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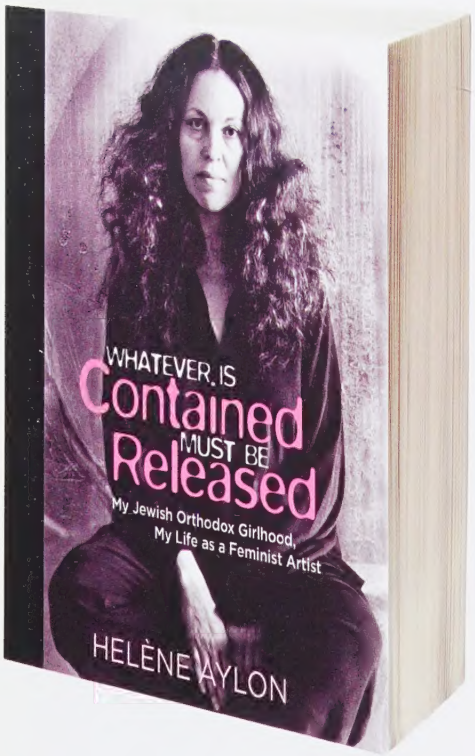

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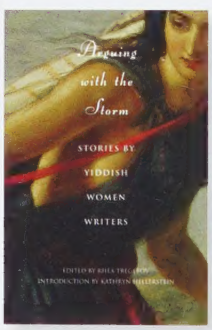

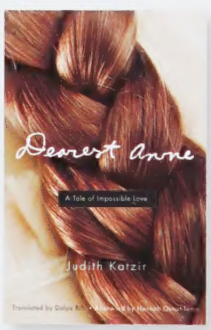

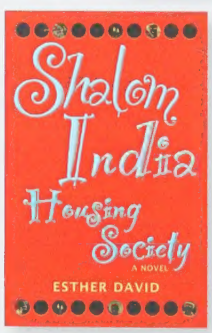

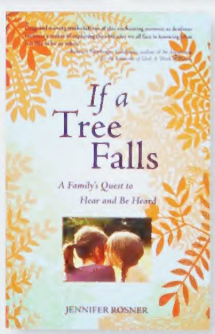

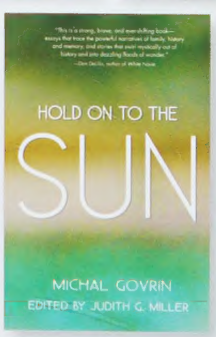

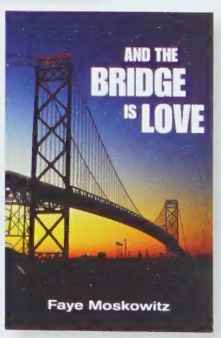

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Lilith

vol. 37, no. 2 • summer 2012

*In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth."**

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HOLLIE CHASTAIN

"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."

—Nessa Rapoport

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Lilith
independent, Jewish & frankly feminist

NICOLE HOLLANDER

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Changing how you think about wedding vows. Changing what you feel about being Jewish if you're poor. Changing social structures with the money you give away. Even changing your gender. Making change can upend our expectations.

And yet some things resist change. The ways women prefer to communicate is one of them. Even in a digital age, women choose real-time, real-life conversations. In person or by phone, over coffee or over drinks, while editing or while bicycling, direct talk feels like a very female and necessary tool. The setting may be your office rather than the village water well, but the medium is still conversation.

A display case of memorabilia from a male writer triggered my ruminations about women's talk as a way of doing business. At the Brandeis University special collections library last month, I browsed a display featuring numerous letters between Joseph Heller (author of *Catch 22*, etc.; he died in 1999) and his editors, fans and detractors. Handwritten, typed on vellum or replicated in carbon copies, the exchanges seemed to me so very male. Not because of their message so much as for the permanence of their medium.

I found myself comparing those 1960s missives with the Lilith archival collection—files dating back to the magazine's launch in the mid-1970s which are now being offered to venues where they can be used for research and programs. The files are full of detailed letters about manuscripts on new rituals, proposals for interviews with Jewish women behind bars, suggestions about subjects for investigative reports, a batch of handmade feminist hagadot created on campuses, handouts from long-ago conferences about moving women forward in the Jewish community, fan mail bouquets, and complaints from the offended. But the preferred mode for exchanges Lilith editors had with our authors was often in person or by phone. Now it's by Skype too.

Seems to me it's a female thing. I find a personal connection is critically useful when helping to shape, say, a memoir or a politically charged subject. But—here's the rub—when the talking stops, there isn't an email thread to print out and stash in an archive. Because of the useful, relational way many women prefer to do business, the record may be cheated of some pointed opinions, anecdotes and insights, both bitter and sweet. Let's acknowledge that some of our fulcrum moments, stop-time incidents in which pivotal changes happen, are still in need of mention. Here's one example.

Years ago, when Lilith was just getting off the ground, I had an illuminating phone conversation with the canonical Cynthia Ozick. I'd called to ask her to write for Lilith (which she did, then and afterward). She asked, gently, what we paid authors. I breezily "explained" that we did not pay our authors, *yet*. "Do you," she inquired, trying graciously to set me straight, "pay your printer?"

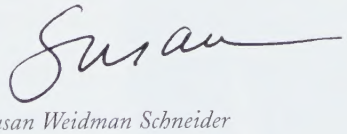
"Well, yes—we pay the *printer*. Because we have to." The minute the words were out of my mouth, of course, I rued having spoken them; actually, I rued having *thought* them. And from that point on, Lilith paid authors.

Sometimes change is spurred by revolution, sometimes by recognition. This conversation marked a pivot point. It led to the establishment of a feminist policy and a Lilith publishing principle. I've never asked Cynthia Ozick if she remembers our talk, but several times in Lilith's 35 years I've had occasion to recall that brief exchange and what it reveals about valuing creative work, and women's work.

Recognizing and describing those "fulcrum moments," pivot points when change happens

Much of women's experience shows up only on the screen playing in our own heads and memories—like my brief, instructive dialogue with Cynthia Ozick. While I've had warm handwritten notes from her in the intervening years—and while the Lilith archives contain plenty of other fascinating gems—you're likely reading the tale of that germinal conversation for the first time here. (Perhaps someone needs to record Lilith staffers leafing through every file in those archives and explaining the backstory lurking in each one!)

Institutional memory, women's organizations' history, and our sometimes deeply revelatory verbal exchanges should somewhere be saved. If you have information about such experiences that will elude history if not for your recollection, share the narrative! Even without carbon paper and vellum letterhead, we must make sure women's evolutionary stories don't go missing. That's why the Lilith archival collection itself is such an irreplaceable and valuable record. Change, as you'll read in the pages of this issue, often builds on what came before.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN

I'm flattered that you're all so interested in my vagina.

Everyone's a little dangerous.

I realized Judaism and Scouting weren't necessarily connected.

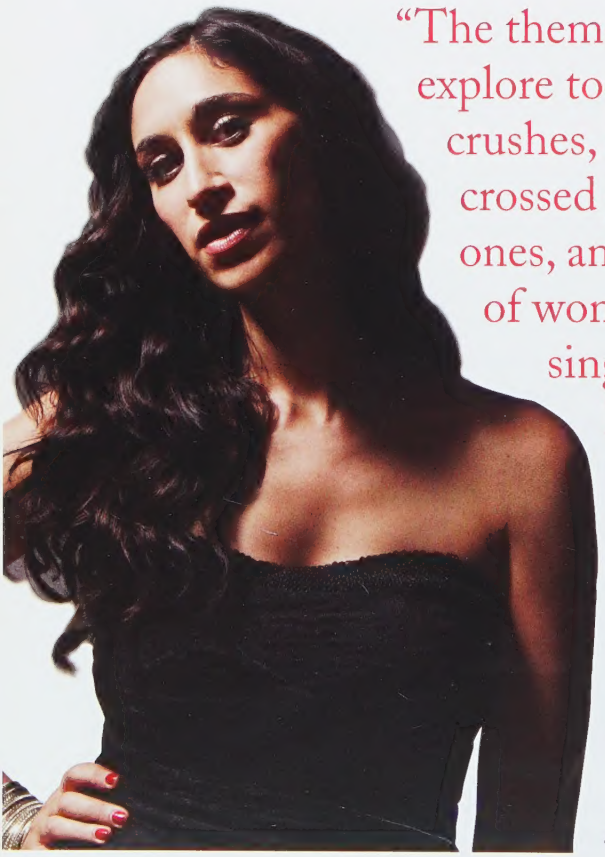
Why does the audience find a toxic Jewish woman so hilarious?

I thought "Jewish feminist" was an oxymoron.

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

Ladino Feminist Rock



"The themes are universal, the same themes people explore today: going off to war, unrequited love, crushes, death, family dynamics. The music has crossed geographic boundaries and political ones, and the songs are often very celebratory of women—and very sexy. Too often, Ladino singers sing without really understanding the lyrics. They sing the music because of its undeniable value as a tradition we all want to preserve. But I think if more people took the time to really examine and dig into the lyrics, they might see a different, more complex and intellectual side of the music."

American-born Ladino singer and songwriter **Sarah Aroeste** on her Judeo-Spanish album "Gracia."

DROR FORSHEE PHOTOGRAPHY

"I'm Jewish. I keep kosher in my home. Judaism believes that therapeutic abortion, namely abortions performed in order to preserve the life of the mother, are not only permissible but mandatory. The stage of pregnancy does not matter. Wherever there is a question of the life of the mother or that of the unborn child, Jewish law rules in favor of preserving the life of the mother. The status of the fetus as human life does not equal that of the mother. I have not asked you to adopt and adhere to my religious beliefs. Why are you asking me to adopt yours? And finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm flattered that you're all so interested in my vagina."

Michigan State Representative **Lisa Brown**, speaking out during an abortion bill debate on June 13, 2012. Republican State Representative **Mike Callton** found the word vagina "so offensive, I don't even want to say it in front of women. I would not say that in mixed company."

I remember well the state of affairs before Roe v. Wade. Abortion in New York was actually made legal three years before that historic decision, in large measure due to the work, research and advocacy of **Dr. Jean Pakter**. Her reporting on the dozens of women injured or killed each year by illegal practitioners, just in NYC, was instrumental in the historic Supreme Court decision that followed.

AVRA COHEN on **Dr. Jean Pakter** (1911–2012) at *www.meetup.com*'s "Paradigm Shift."

A Woman Speaks Out in Moscow Protests

"Socrates might be surprised to find out that we have included him in the history of civil disobedience," says **Tamara Eidelman**, a 53-year-old history teacher from one of Moscow's better schools.

This is the first in a series of lectures to be held at Occupy Abai, the latest chapter in Russia's protest movement, so named for the monument to the Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbayev next to which it is set. Unlike any other "Occupy" camp in the world, this one has not a single tent: camping would violate city laws. Everything here is pointedly legal, and so those who will stay the night spread out their sleeping bags under the open sky....

Eidelman quotes from Henry David Thoreau and Charles Parnell; she describes the origins of the word boycott. She talks of Leo Tolstoy, Ghandi and, finally, Martin Luther King. Often, she points out, peaceful change took a very long time to come. The bus boycott challenging racial segregation in Montgomery, Alabama, lasted 381 days.

CHERNAVSKIY ALEXANDER / DEMOTIX

Early morning scene with young activists in the opposition camp "Occupy Abai" at the Chistiye Prudy, or Clean Ponds, where activists vowed to continue the roving protest in Moscow.

But sometimes momentum has gathered fast. Eidelman describes the 1960 sit-ins at the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. "On the first day, there were four people. The next day, there were 29. The day after that, more than 60. The day after that, 300."

The crowd shouts "Bravo!" We are applauding the history teacher and Socrates and Thoreau and Martin Luther King—and ourselves, for being braver and better than we thought we were.

MASHA GESSEN from "Stroll Moscow, Occupy Abai," May 14, 2012 at *nytimes.com*.

The First Four

The number 40 appears several times in the Bible. Most memorably, the Hebrews spent 40 years wandering in the desert before reaching the Promised Land.

The number 40 took on another significance in June with a program to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the ordination of **Rabbi Sally Preisand**, the first female rabbi in modern times (Reform, 1972). To celebrate, her temple of 25 years, Monmouth Reform Temple in Tinton Falls, NJ, invited **Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso** (Reconstructionist, 1974), **Rabbi Amy Eilberg** (Conservative, 1984), and **Rabba Sara Hurwitz** (Orthodox, 2009) to join her in a forum. Each of these women was the first female to be ordained rabbi in her movement.

The pioneering clergy shared their journeys, citing the tremendous support they'd received from family and teachers. And they spoke of how to dress properly, so that they wouldn't appear too sexual, but feminine "enough;" how to balance family and career; how to sit on the bima; whether to kiss congregants "Shabbat Shalom;" the stress, and especially the loneliness. And the frustration that, when female rabbis get together, they *still* must discuss issues of parity with their male counterparts.

While each of the rabbis had many hurdles to surmount, it is not surprising that Rabba Hurwitz, both Orthodox and new to the pulpit, appears to be having the most frustration, noting that she feels bad for her children, "who will have to defend me all their lives." She talked about her struggles, noting that she has been accused of trying to split the Orthodox movement, that she has been invited to teach and then had the invitation rescinded, and has been told to "leave her title at home." It was touching to see how supportive these four women were with one another, especially when Priesand leaned over to Hurwitz and assured her that they all—her three predecessors—had been through the same thing.

Preisand shared that she wasn't trying to be the "first woman rabbi"—she just wanted to be a *rabbi*. Sasso talked about her struggles bridging her feminist and Jewish sides—"I thought 'Jewish feminist' was an oxymoron," she said. She told us how supportive her childhood rabbi had been, even in death: he instructed in his will that he wanted *her* to be one of the officiants at his funeral.

Forty years after the first woman was ordained, it's thrilling to count many accomplishments: over 1000 women rabbis across the movements, four more Orthodox female rabbis to be ordained next year; Israel with its first government salaried female rabbi; and the chair of the New York Board of Rabbis, and the Executive Director of the (Conservative) Rabbinical Assembly are women.

The counting began with these four courageous, strong women, who turned the culture of Judaism towards egalitarianism, and a beginning of repairing the world.

NITA POLAY LEVIN

Two New Conservative Rabbis Have What to Say

Because of the relatively short history of women being ordained as rabbis in the Conservative Movement [since 1982], and the limited access that women have had to some of the top jobs in our communities, the role of women in the rabbinate is unlike the role of men. It is different because we still need to wage internal battles over whether or not we officiate at conversions and other legal situations. It is different because we know that even though our communities may accept us, love us, and give us the deepest respect, we are not even counted in a minyan if we venture into more religious communities, let alone given rabbinic authority. The role of women in the rabbinate is shaped by these external forces. I wish that would change.

ABBI SHAROFSKY

At my *Tekes Hasmakhah* [ordination], I wore a strand of pearls that belonged to my grandmother Ann, for whom I am named. She was an active member of her synagogue in the tiny town of Hamilton, Ohio. She cared passionately about Jewish continuity and the flourishing of her congregation. She died in 1964 and never knew a woman rabbi in her lifetime, but I have no doubt she would be pleased with the way things have changed.... I am grateful for the courage of the women and men who wrestled with the tradition and found openings for change. I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to carry on their legacy, to continue to push for more just and egalitarian institutions in my rabbinate, both in ritual life and in the "externals" of how clergy make a living and the ways in which we are able to sustain ourselves and our families.

ANNIE LEWIS

More at *blog.jtsa.edu*.

As for the "competition between women" thing: Perhaps there's something politically to be gained from perpetuating the idea that women are naturally dangerous for other women. The truth is, everyone's a little dangerous, not only women for women.

Author **Sheila Heti** on her new novel, "How Should A Person Be?", interviewed at *theawl.com*.

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A Small World

Artists **Sanford Biggers** and **Jennifer Zackin** juxtapose home movies of their families—one African American and one Jewish American—to explore the intersections of middle-class life across racial lines. Originally recorded in silent super-8 film, the video shows the artists as children growing up in New York and Los Angeles in the 1970s. Typical family events and holidays—birthdays, Hanukkah, Christmas, barbecues, family trips to Disneyland, playtime in the backyard—are shown simultaneously, drawing attention to similarities of class while recognizing differences of ethnicity.

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Alcohol? Oxycodon? Helping Israelis Treat Addiction

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Inauguration of the Toby Mower Presidential Development Chairs in Addiction Prevention and Treatment

This spring, **Toby Mower**, a substance abuse treatment counselor, gave a significant grant to Ben Gurion University of the Negev to create Israel's first-ever curriculum teaching practitioners ways to treat—and even prevent—addiction. Mower, 73, told Lilith that the spur for this innovative education venture came out of her own experience. She has been in recovery from alcoholism for more than 30 years.

"People look at drunks as falling-down-drunk, but many people, including myself, were functioning individuals. I was not 'an addict'. I still went to my kids' games, went to the PTA. Nobody intervened with me, but I got into an auto accident. My first prayer after the accident was 'Oh my god!'—They didn't have seat belts then, and my kids weren't with me in the car that day." A therapist insisted that she go into a 12-step program. Although later she did find out that there were a handful of Jewish women in the program, "There were none in the meetings I went to at that time." Now, she said, "about half the rooms are Jewish people."

Mower, a registered nurse, decided to leave nursing for a masters degree in psychology, with a specialty in addiction counseling. "Jews have never been exempt from addiction. And it is a family disease. The whole family is affected, and if family members don't get into their own 12-step program they still try to control the addict."

She was instrumental in launching a "sober living facility," the country's first Jewish recovery home, in Baltimore; the women's facility is Tova House, for Toby Mower's Hebrew name. (There's a residence for men as well.) The addiction, she pointed out, used to be largely to alcohol; now "it is mostly drugs. Cocaine. Oxycodone. Heroin."

A longtime supporter of Ben Gurion University—she and her husband have been on the Board of Governors—Mower approached BGU president **Rivka Carmi**, a physician, asking, "Rivka, how would you like to be another first? You were the first female dean of an Israeli medical school. You were the first female president of an Israeli university. How would you like to be the first Israeli university to treat addiction?" Carmi, said Mower, "jumped on it!"

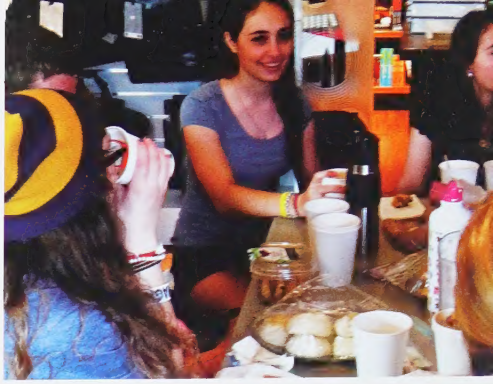
In Israel there was some initial resistance, along the lines of "We don't have a problem here—the Russians brought it in." Mower told the objectors, "You just aren't seeing it, or you have your heads buried in the sand."

The skeptics will "see it" in this new curriculum, which is a requirement for students in social work, nursing, psychology and medicine. And Toby Mower gave the first lecture.

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

CORRECTION: The title of Emma Lazarus's 1883 sonnet about the Statue of Liberty was "The New Colossus." It was mistakenly labeled "The American Colossus" in the article "When Nancy Met Emma: The story behind the Emma Lazarus museum exhibit" (Spring 2012).

Florida Teen Opens Library for Homeless Youth



Lilli Leight and friends.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LILLI LEIGHT

Fifteen-year-old **Lilli Leight** of Miami, Florida, has just won the National Book Foundation's Innovations in Reading Prize for a two-part initiative that began as a bat mitzvah project: a "giving library" that has provided thousands of books for children in a local homeless shelter, and a teen book club aptly named "iRead" to get others involved in this literacy project.

She told Lilith about how her social-change work got started.

"Three years ago I started volunteering at Chapman Partnership, a local homeless shelter, initially my mitzvah project for my bat mitzvah. I worked in the Family Resource Center. When children finished their homework, all attention promptly turned to video games or television. I realized that there were no books available, and that no one ever thought to ask for a book.

"I developed what I like to refer to as a "reading ecosystem" in my community. I began by collecting used books from friends, schools, and local organizations, and new books from my local bookstore, Books and Books, to amass an appealing "giving library" at Chapman, with overflowing shelves, comfortable chairs and a carpet to read on. The number of books in the library depends on the number of children in the center who have taken books home with them. The children are allowed to take as many books with them as they like when they move out of the shelter. About 5,000 books have been donated to date.

"Stage Two consisted of my starting a teen book club, to provide my peers with opportunities to discuss books, meet authors and volunteer at Chapman. Finally, as my high school and other schools learned more about my project, they encouraged their students to volunteer at Chapman as homework helpers. Most rewarding was my work with one first grader. She was reticent when I first began reading with her. She would select a book, which we rarely finished. However when I next returned, she would always know exactly where we had left off. Finally, she began to read, proudly and voraciously; the world of books opened to her. While I'm only 15 years old, this experience has made me feel empowered to help change the world—even if it is just one little girl at a time."

REBECCA KREVAT

Jewish Girl Scouts

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

As people around North America celebrate the Girl Scouts' 100th anniversary this year, I find myself reflecting on how Girl Scouting affected my life. Founder **Juliette Gordon Low**'s vision of empowering young women has been fulfilled tremendously, and yet not enough.

There are parts of the country where "Jewish Girl Scout" is an oxymoron. Luckily for me, in Houston, Texas, my mother, **Lisa Stone**, and others started a Girl Scout troop in 1997 at my synagogue. When asked what motivated her, my mother responded, "When I was a Girl Scout, I was never quite comfortable attending meetings in churches, so I wanted my daughter to be able to enjoy her troop more fully. I also believed combining Scouting and being Jewish would enrich both."

Judaism and feminism have always been in similar categories in my head; both are critical facets of my personality, helping define my moral code. Scouting and Judaism both promote ethics, education, and community service. Everyone in my troop was encouraged to earn Jewish Girl Scout Awards, created by the National Jewish Committee on Girl Scouting. You can win awards as you move from grade to grade. At each level, Scouts are required to consider questions about their own Jewish identities, speak with Jewish community leaders, and study Jewish and Israeli history. I always enjoyed researching famous Jewish women, **Golda Meir** and **Gloria Steinem** among them. I earned my first awards reluctantly, at the insistence of my mother, but eventually it became my own decision.

It was only when my original troop disbanded that I began to realize Judaism and Scouting weren't necessarily connected. In my new troop, I was the only Jewish member. When something Jewish conflicted with meetings, more often than not Judaism was my priority.

I found I liked being the only Jew in the troop; I felt like a goodwill ambassador. I was always happy to answer questions the other girls had about kosher laws or the holidays I was observing, like Passover or Hanukkah. However, I no longer had companions with whom to earn the Jewish awards. As a teenager, it was crucial for me to consider whether or not this was a "cool" way to spend my time, but in my rational heart of hearts, I found I didn't really care! I was always very proud to receive the awards.

My parents are still involved in Scouting, even after their children graduated from high school four years ago. My mother chairs the Houston Jewish Scouting Committee, so when there's a Jewish Scouting Ceremony while I'm home from college, I find myself in the audience, wearing my dear old Girl Scout sash. At one recent reception, I was suddenly surrounded by little girls, between 5 and 10 years old, admiring my sash. Some were also Girl Scouts, but most of them were siblings of Boy Scouts or children of Scout leaders. I was peppered with questions. I described each badge I had earned, explained the significance of various pins, and related the special importance of my Jewish awards. My hope is they left my side with the inspiration to become or continue being *Jewish* Girl Scouts.

MIRIAM CANTOR-STONE

Teen Girl's Torah Trivia

Shalhevet Schwartz is the 14-year-old girl from the Bronx who, in between softball games and the demanding homework at her Jewish high school, studied hard enough to win her division of the National Bible Contest, held at Yeshiva University in New York.

At SAR Academy, a "modern Orthodox" school, Shalhevet is required to wear a skirt to school every day. But she did not see the need to be in dress code on this given Sunday, when her only commitment was to vanquish her competition answering multiple-choice questions on obscure biblical passages. And while there was an English-language division, Shalhevet competed in Hebrew.

Unlike many of her adversaries, Shalhevet has had secular schooling, too. For junior high, she attended Hunter College High School, a public school in Manhattan. Her scriptural training comes largely from her father, **Elliot**, an optometrist and ordained rabbi, and her mother, **Bat Sheva Marcus**, a sexual dysfunction specialist who wrote a doctoral dissertation on vibrator use and who is also a founder of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, an advocacy group for women's rights among traditionally observant Jews.

"I guess you could say we're a little to the left of most of the people here," Shalhevet said, lingering in the Lamport Auditorium after her victory.

"But I'm pretty religious," she said. "When I left in jeans this morning, my mom was, like, 'Are you sure you want to wear jeans?' and I was, like, 'Whatever, they can handle it.'"

From **MARK OPPENHEIMER**, on the New York Times "Beliefs" blog, May 5, 2012

PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG

What's Funny About a Toxic Jewish Mother?

"The Lyons," **Nicky Silver**'s play, now on Broadway at the Cort Theater for an open-ended run, is billed as a comedy. When I saw it recently, the audience around me—mostly Jewish, comfortable and over 65—seemed to love it, laughing, cheering and applauding (as have the vast majority of critics). I did not love it, and I've been trying to puzzle out why that is.

From the first moments, **Linda Lavin**, playing Rita Lyons, a brittle, bitter Jewish mother of a certain age, has the audience cheering her. (If she is Rita Lyons, shouldn't the play be called The Lyonses? Unless the title is making a point, and she is the Lyons, singular. Confusing, unsettling, oddly like my experience of this play—a joke I don't get.) Lavin deserves her recent Tony nomination. Rita embodies the negative aspects of the Jewish mother stereotype (perpetually disappointed, nagging, manipulative and undermining) along with a dash of Jewish American Princess (materialistic, indifferent to sex, and selfish). She's terrible to her (understandably crabby) dying husband Ben, impatient for him to get on with it so she can redecorate; she sees her children, Lisa and Curtis, as colossal (though not surprising) disappointments.

Her ostensible expressions of love and support are barbed with dissatisfaction and contempt. As the action of the play progresses, we learn that she has felt stifled and trapped in her marriage, but that made me feel contempt rather than sympathy. She stayed in a toxic situation, making it exponentially more toxic. What did anyone ever do to her to deserve her withering scorn? And why does the audience find it so hilarious, and moving?

The message seems to be that family is toxic, and you should get the hell away if you want to survive and find love.

The audience's appreciation had a rebellious sense of you-go-girl, let-it-all-hang-out release; they cheered Rita on as she tells everyone how disappointing they are and how she's never liked any of them. They adored her, and left the play all smiles. I've talked to people in their sixties who loved "The Lyons," who found it bold and funny, painful and angry. Maybe I'm the wrong generation for this play. Silver himself is 51. I don't see anything funny or even entertaining about isolated, self-destructive and cruel characters who lie to each other and themselves, in lieu of connection or acceptance. Further, Silver's version of the Jewish mother/JAP stereotype feels not just emptily nasty but stale here. I have a bewildering sense that I missed something, or that I'm being humorlessly politically correct. So many people have enjoyed this play. I'm interested in what they saw that I did not see, and welcome comments from readers who've seen the play. Tell me what I missed!

Kate Jennings Grant as Lisa and Linda Lavin as Rita in "The Lyons."

SOPHIE DANIS OBERFIELD

WEB EXCLUSIVE: For more and to comment on "The Lyons"—or on other recent stage and screen representations of Jewish women—go to *Lilith.org/blog*.

Weddings!! Including Old (and New) Wedding Rings, a Feminist Wedding Vow That Makes Housework Equitable, and a Vintage Marriage Agreement

It's wedding season!!

At Lilith, this doesn't just mean a story about two beautiful, thoughtful brides (and their feminist male rabbi whose chosen middle name, Scherlinder, is a portmanteau of his and his wife's mothers' maiden names—very cool!). *It also means a story about reclaiming a forgotten Jewish ritual: the medieval and pre-modern custom of grooms giving their brides "house rings" under the huppah. We're re-purposing said house rings by means of a new wedding "justice vow" to shout out under your huppah*—do it!

To go along with the rings and vows, we reprise a feminist classic about marriage equality, circa 1970, by Alix Kates Shulman. Alas, the struggle for equally shared domestic and childcare responsibilities (men doing half the dishes and diapers) is still with us 42 years later! On the other hand, who knew that two Judaica artists are still making house rings (with a post-modern twist) today?

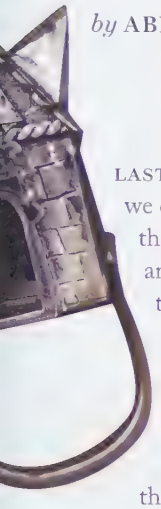
It all just makes a kallah *want to break a glass!* Mazal tov!

—SUSAN SCHNUR

The "House Rings" Miracle

How Our Very Modern Wedding Was Blessed by Antiquity

by ABIGAIL ROME



LAST SPRING WHEN MY PARTNER AND I GOT MARRIED, we didn't use just two wedding rings. We used four. And that wasn't because we were trying to upset convention any more than we already had—with two brides of two faiths under a huppah. To the contrary, we were following a venerable Jewish tradition, in use as long ago as the 14th century, in which Ashkenazi grooms placed ornamental rings shaped like houses on the index fingers of their brides. (Obviously we didn't follow the "groom" part!) The ring signified the sharing of a home and offered an opportunity for the couple's new domestic relationship to be blessed, though there was no added liturgy. The rings were often oversized because they were not intended to actually be worn; they were for the purpose of ceremonial "witnessing." The giving and accepting of a ring is the central legal act, along with the recital of the vow, of a Jewish wedding.*

House rings were generally borrowed by the nuptial couple from their Jewish ecclesiastical community. Historically, most Jews were too poor to own rings, and there was not yet a tradition of wearing them for the duration of a marriage. During the ceremony the house ring would be placed on the bride's index finger, not the conventional wedding-ring one, because the pointer is best suited to holding a ring aloft for all to see. There was also a folk belief that a special artery ran directly from one's index finger to the heart.

TODAY, FEW JEWS HAVE HEARD OF HOUSE RINGS, and the custom of referencing domestic sharing in this way has fallen by the wayside. If you visit an art museum with a Judaica collection, however, there's a good chance you will see some. A 2008 exhibit in London at the Wallace Collection, called "Treasures of the Black Death," featured exceptionally beautiful Jewish house rings from Colmar, France, and Erfurt, Germany. The 14th century was probably the most perilous era for Jews prior to the Holocaust; they were blamed for the Black Death and often murdered en masse. (In the 13th century, Colmar was a refuge for Jews expelled from other towns, but in 1349 all the Jews living there were burned at the stake.) It was well-known that Jews often buried their valuables when they were forced to flee; they intended to return at a later, safer time to reclaim their possessions. Often, though, Jews were killed in pogroms, and neighbors were quick to dig around greedily in the hopes of unearthing buried treasures.

Surprisingly, the cache in the London exhibit from Erfurt, Germany, wasn't found until 1998—650 years after it had been hidden! It was in the wall of a house that once stood close to the town's 11th-century synagogue, and was discovered during excavation for a new block of flats. The trove from Colmar, France, lay buried until 1863, and was uncovered in a wall during renovations of a corner house on the former *Rue des Juifs* [Jews Street]. It is variously said that the "houses" on Jewish rings imaginatively render the Temple in Jerusalem (invoked during Jewish weddings when grooms and/or brides smash a glass); the oft-mentioned biblical "*Beit Yisrael*" [House of Israel]; and/or the home that the nuptial couple will make together. Both the German and French rings in the Wallace Collection exhibit were engraved with the words "Mazal Tov." Sadly, luck did not find its way to their owners.

My family, the Schockens, is unusual in having our own house ring. By the time I got married, 13 couples had already used it at their ceremonies.

MY FAMILY IS UNUSUAL IN THAT WE HAVE our very own house ring, and while no one in my extant family knows its exact provenance, it has been a cherished heirloom. We believe that my Uncle Ted bought it, following in his father's footsteps. My German-Jewish grandfather, Zalman Schocken, was an

THIS PAGE, PHOTOS BY DEB LINDSEY. OPPOSITE PAGE, THE ISRAEL MUSEUM, JERUSALEM.

*There is rabbinic discussion about marrying with a borrowed ring, as the groom is enjoined to give the bride an article of value. The *Shulkhan Arukh* suggests that a borrowed ring is acceptable if all know that it is borrowed. Rabbi Moshe Isserles (16th century) notes that marrying with a borrowed ring is controversial, but that, alas, it has become the custom. "Fictive giving" (like that of a *lulav* which we are halakhically enjoined to own, but which can be "given" by a synagogue to an individual, then ritually used, then "given back") might have been the principle by which these borrowed house rings were deemed acceptable to use.

Abigail Rome placing a house ring on the finger of her bride, Eileen Nivera, with Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb looking on. Previous page: the two Jewish ceremonial house rings used at Abigail and Eileen's marriage ceremony. Note that one ring is bandaged; antique house rings are very oversized.

Our rings said "Mazal Tov" too, like the buried rings of Colmar, France, and Erfurt, Germany.

avid collector and connoisseur of Jewish manuscripts, books, artwork and antiquities. Born into a poor family in Poland, he quickly became a self-educated business pioneer, establishing (with his brother) a chain of department stores throughout Germany prior to World War II. He did very well, and used his wealth to promote the history and culture of Jews living in the Diaspora. Over the years, my grandfather amassed and preserved thousands of works of Jewish art and literature, as well as religious documents, most of which were donated to what became the Jewish Theological Seminary's Schocken Institute for Jewish Research in Jerusalem. He also founded two publishing houses, Schocken Publishing House in Israel and Schocken Books in New York, and bought the progressive Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, now run by my cousin in Jerusalem.

While many of my grandfather's offspring were, and still are, involved in publishing, his legacy as a collector also had a significant impact on the family. In the 1960s, Uncle Ted bought the antique Jewish house ring and stored it in a small leather box. He was the Keeper of the Ring, loaning it to whomever in the family was getting married. The groom would present it to the bride, in addition to exchanging simple wedding bands, and after each ceremony, the ring would go back into the box to be stored until the next wedding. Ted was a meticulous record keeper, and he maintained a small card with the ring, listing each couple that used it and the date. By the time I got around to getting married (surprisingly late in life), there were 13 other couples on the list. My three older brothers all used the ring, and with my name added, that made all four of us siblings, in our respective seasons, borrowers of the family house ring.

After Ted died, his eldest daughter Miriam took over the role of Keeper of the Ring, and then when Miriam died, her sister Eva asked Miriam's widower Jerry if she could assume the responsibility. Jerry was amenable, of course, but when he went to look for it, it was nowhere to be found. The family became worried. When it finally turned up, in the corner of a forgotten cabinet, a miracle, it seemed, had occurred: there was not one ring, but two. The second was nearly identical to the original family house ring, but no one in the extended family had any idea where it had come from.

PHOTO BY DEB LYNDSEY

WHILE I'M NOT MUCH OF A BELIEVER IN THE SUPERNATURAL, the appearance of a second ring in time for my same-sex marriage seemed wondrous to me, a sign of unconditional acceptance from my parents, uncles and grandparents, none of whom was alive to attend my wedding. They had started this family house ring tradition many years ago, and now they made it possible for us to continue to carry it out properly—with two rings for two brides. I can't ask for a better blessing from my ancestors, still very much with us in spirit.

I couldn't help but think back to the buried rings of Colmar and Erfurt with the words "Mazal Tov" tragically engraved on their roofs. Our rings said "Mazal Tov," too, and when my wife Eileen and I exchanged them, we hoped that they would symbolize freedom and equality for couples such as ours, in houses everywhere, and for nuptials in the centuries to come. ■

Abigail Rome is a freelance writer, environmental professional and advocate of marriage equality. She hails from a family that has long been active in progressive issues, both Jewish and secular.

Try a New Wedding Vow (This Time the Man Gets the Ring)

House Ring! Housework! Pioneering Men, Step Up!

by RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

MY GRANDFATHER AND three of his seven siblings immigrated to America from Zawada, Poland, and ever after talked about one subject perseveratively: the hard life of their mother Rose.

"She never had a day that was really living," was what my great-uncle told his granddaughter, Shelley Roth, when she interviewed him:

To get the family's brick oven started, Rose was sometimes on her knees for an hour, blowing on the wood. She ground grain in a makeshift mill in the hallway; to get 10 cups of grain (enough for three loaves) took hours. Several times a day, Rose drew water from the neighborhood well, loading two heaving buckets on to a yoke across her shoulders. From 4 A.M. until 10 at night, Rose cooked, washed and cleaned for the family of 10; they lived in a small wooden house with a thatched roof, dirt floors and a huge meat hook for *shekhting* that dangled from the ceiling. There was no sewage, no electricity, no refrigeration. In the summer, Rose shvitzed beneath her *shaytl*.

My great-uncle remembered his father, a klezmer fiddler and reluctant farmer, standing in front of the mirror brushing his whiskers, getting ready to go play a *khasseneh* [wedding]; outside the window, there would be Rose, wearing her wooden yoke, endlessly hauling water.

My great-grandfather considered his wife's household tasks "beneath his dignity." In the U.S., replaying these scenes of gross domestic inequity in his head, my great-uncle sent money back to Zawada earmarked for his mother. "So a water well could be drilled beside the house," he told Shelley.

ALMOST 80 YEARS LATER, domestic equity issues have changed—but not that much. The norm of two-earner families has hardly begun to rectify the reality of women's "invisible" home labor. My female therapist friends joke that if they get a new client who's a (heterosexual) young mother, they know that the clinical issue will be rage.

In post-modern marital relationships based on love and mutuality, why are these injustices still with us? And don't they deserve to be framed in moral terms—religious terms—alongside, for example, our marital vows, so that we might pledge to "love and comfort, in sickness and health, *through babysitter screw-ups, noticing unfolded laundry and preparing for the Jewish holidays*, so long as we both shall live?"

With this in mind, I have long wanted to write a wedding vow for domestic justice, but I didn't have a ritual "handle." [See how Lilith used Miriam's Cup for a new ritual for adoptive moms of Chinese daughters; Winter 2011–12.] When Abigail Rome's manuscript about house rings came into the office, though, things came into focus. I now had an authentic—indeed, venerable—Jewish handle.

In the following ritual, the bride gives her groom a Jewish house ring—a long overdue corrective. Either before or after this ritual, the bride and groom also exchange traditional vows and rings.

Couples: Let Lilith know if you use this ceremony. We eagerly await rolling out the white carpet for pioneering men!

OFFICIANT: In this world where two-earner families are the norm, the problems of husband and wife sharing equally in the responsibility for their household and children remain very much with us. Women still do significantly more housework and childcare than men; on average, 15 more hours per week, totaling an extra month of 24-hour days each year. In a relationship based on love and mutual nurturance, the word for this is "injustice."

GROOM: Unpaid, unheralded, and unending domestic (and childcare) labor—never done!—belongs *equally* to us both. I have a moral responsibility to assume half of these burdens.

The bride picks up the house ring from the table and puts it on the groom's index finger for all to witness. He shows it to assembled family and friends. ["Witnessing" the exchange of an article of value in this way is halakhically traditional.]

GROOM (*repeats after the bride*): With this house ring/ I promise to devote myself/ to taking on equally with you/ the domestic tasks of our household/ and of our family to come.

ALL: Amen.

BRIDE (*repeats after the groom*): A man of valor/ who can find?/ This is one of the reasons/ I am marrying you.

ALL: Amen.

Groom removes the house ring and returns it to the table.

GROOM: Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people, and your thankless tasks, my thankless tasks.

BRIDE: On behalf of all women, everywhere and throughout the ages, AMEN. Do I have a witness?

ALL: Amen. ■

"A Marriage Agreement"—1970

by ALIX KATES SHULMAN

This iconic, and iconoclastic, argument—that a woman and man should share equally the responsibility for their household and children—was derided when it first appeared. Norman Mailer, Russell Baker and Joan Didion were shocked, affronted. The real shock is just how relevant Shulman's Marriage Agreement is for couples today.

WHEN MY HUSBAND and I were first married, keeping house was less a burden than a game. We both had full time jobs, and twice a month we'd spend Saturday cleaning our apartment and taking our laundry to the Laundromat. We shopped for food together after work; sometimes we ate out; we had our breakfast at a diner near work; sometimes we cooked together, and there were few dishes to wash. Our domestic life was beautifully uncomplicated.

Then our son was born. I quit my job to stay home with him. After our daughter was born, domestic life, the only life I had any longer, was suddenly very complicated. We automatically accepted the sex roles society assigns. My husband worked all day in an office, while I took on almost all the tasks of housekeeping and child rearing. His life changed little when the children came, but mine was completely transformed. Keeping the apartment neat took hours of each day; I had to prepare meals for from one to four people at a time, and everyone ate different food; laundry became a daily chore. I seemed to be working every minute yet could not get everything done.

Even more burdensome than the physical work of housekeeping was the relentless responsibility I had for the children. If there was ever a moment to read, I read to them. I wanted to work on my writing, but there was no time. Later, when I took freelance work in order to keep some contact with the world, I had to squeeze it into my "free" time.

My husband's job kept him at work later and later and sometimes took him out of town. The children were usually asleep when he got home, and we were too tired to do anything but sleep. If I suffered from too much domesticity, he suffered from too little.

As the children grew, our domestic arrangement seemed increasingly unfair. Why should a couple's decision to have a family mean that she must completely change her life while he missed out on their children? When I finally began to see my situation through the new women's liberation point of view, I realized that the only way we could possibly survive as a family was to throw out the traditional sex roles we'd been living by and, starting from scratch, define our roles for ourselves. Wishing to be once more as equal and independent as we had been when we were first married, we decided to make an agreement in which we could define our roles our own way.

We wanted to share completely the responsibility for caring for our household and children, by then five and seven. We recognized that we would have to be extremely wary of backsliding into our old domestic habits. If it was my husband's night to take care of the children, I would have to avoid checking up on how he was managing, and if the baby sitter didn't show up it would be his problem. When our agreement was merely verbal it didn't work, despite our best intentions, so we wrote it out instead.

> *"Naming some of the hidden tasks, so often considered trivial, that are taken for granted in the traditional divisions of household labor."*
>
> *A.K.S. on JWA.ORG*

MARRIAGE AGREEMENT

I. PRINCIPLES

We reject the notion that the work which brings in more money is the more valuable. The ability to earn more money is already a privilege which must not be compounded by enabling the larger earner to buy out of his/her duties and put the burden on the one who earns less, or on someone hired from the outside.

As parents, we believe we must share all responsibility for taking care of our children and home—not only the work, but the responsibility. At least during the first year of this agreement, *sharing responsibility* shall mean dividing the *jobs* and dividing the *time*. In principle, jobs should be shared equally, 50-50, but deals may be made by mutual agreement. The schedule may be flexible, but changes must be formally agreed upon.

II. JOB BREAKDOWN AND SCHEDULE

A) CHILDREN

1. MORNINGS: Waking children; getting their clothes out, making their lunches; seeing that they have notes, homework, money, passes, books, etc.; brushing their hair; giving them breakfast; making coffee for us. *Every other week each parent does all.*

2. TRANSPORTATION: Getting children to and from lessons, doctors, dentists, friends' houses, park, parties, movies, library, etc. Making appointments. *Parts occurring between 3:00 and 6:30 PM fall to wife. Husband does all weekend transportation and pickups after 6.*

3. HELP: Helping with homework, personal problems, projects like cooking, making gifts, experiments, planting, etc.; answering questions, explaining things. *Parts occurring between 3:00 and 6:30 PM fall to wife. After 6, husband does Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. Wife does Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. Friday is split according to who has done extra work during the week.*

4. NIGHTTIME: Getting children to take baths, brush their teeth, go to bed, put away their toys and clothes; reading with them; tucking them in and having night-talks; handling if they wake and call in the night. *Nighttime (and all Help after 6:30): Husband does Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. Wife does Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. Friday is split according to who has done extra work during the week.*

5. BABYSITTERS: Getting babysitters, which sometimes takes an hour of phoning. *Sitters must be called by the parent being replaced. If no sitter shows, that parent stays home.*

6. SICK CARE: Calling doctors, checking out symptoms, getting prescriptions filled, remembering to give medicine, taking days off to stay home with sick child; providing special activities. *To be worked out, since wife seems to do it all.*

7. WEEKENDS: All of the above, plus special activities (beach, park, zoo, etc.). *Split equally. Husband is free all day Saturday, wife is free all day Sunday.*

B) HOUSEWORK

8. COOKING: Breakfast, dinners (children, parents, guests). *Husband does weekend breakfasts, dinner on Sunday and when he's on duty if wife is out. Wife does all the rest.*

9. SHOPPING: Food, housewares, children's clothes and supplies. *Divide by convenience.*

10. CLEANING: Dishes daily; apartment weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. *Wife does dishes Monday, Wednesday, Saturday; husband Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday. Husband does all house cleaning in exchange for wife's extra childcare and sick care.*

11. LAUNDRY: Home laundry; dry cleaning (take and pick up). *Wife does home laundry. Husband takes care of dry cleaning.* ■

A fuller version of this "Marriage Agreement" first ran in 1970 in the journal Up From Under and is adapted from A Marriage Agreement and Other Essays: Four Decades of Feminist Writing (Open Road Media, 2012).

Alix Kates Shulman's new novel, Ménage, *is also out this year (Other Press).*

Postmodern House Rings

The Old Is New Again

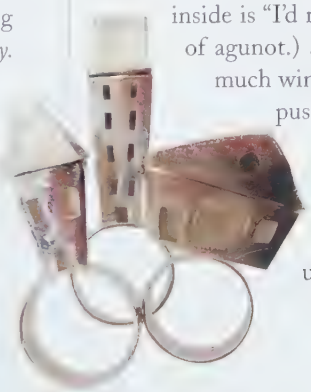
KEN GOLDMAN, 52, is one of the most whimsical Judaica artists out there [check out *kengoldman-art.com*]. A communitarian—he's lived on Kibbutz Shluchot for 27 years, but is a New Jersey boy—he was first drawn to house rings because they "belonged to the community, then became personal property for a short while, then reverted to the community with additional marriages in their history." Goldman sees his artistic responsibility as "reviving traditions and making them work in this century," and he especially likes forms, like house rings, that have both Ashkenazi and Sephardic antecedents.

When Goldman's oldest daughter, Vered, became engaged, he started thinking "about weddings and responsibility. What had I done as a father to prepare my kids for the big real world of marriage?" Goldman's thoughts drifted to Monopoly, "which held great memories for me as a Sabbath observer. As a kid I spent just about every Shabbat afternoon with my friends in endless Monopoly games. It introduced me, in a fun way, to the rules of the grown-up world—real estate, investing, even jail time. I associate Monopoly with being both Jewish and adult."

Vered has been married for a year now, and she wears her dad's Monopoly design (sterling silver with a 14k gold plate) "as an actual wedding ring. It works for her on many levels," says Goldman. "And that's what I'd hoped."

MILA TANYA GRIEBEL, 49, is a formidable silversmith and freeman in London's Goldsmiths' Company (royally chartered in 1327). Studying art at college, she one day returned home to experience her parents' possessions with fresh eyes. "Why don't we have any inherited family Judaica?" she asked. Her father filled her in: his flight from Poland, alone, at 11; his aunt Mila's death in Auschwitz; his grandmother's survival at Auschwitz and her subsequent murder, post-War, when she returned to her home. Virtually all of her father's extended family was killed. Griebel learned that her grandmother had buried the family's silver and that her father returned to dig it up 50 years later, but it was gone.

She made her first house ring "when I was going bonkers doing a huge tree of life for a synagogue—it took months, and I decided to do something totally different." Griebel loved the idea that house rings "had these little roofs that opened up. Inside there'd be a goblet or set of tablets. Mine open to a table with wine, a symbol of people coming together." (Griebel also made a ring topped with the word "Marriage." Inscribed inside is "I'd rather have a cup of tea"—her response to the plight of agunot.) She enjoys the artistic constraints of *halakha*. "How much wine you need in a *becher* [wine goblet], how far you can push the form of a menorah."



The Jewish Museum owns four of Griebel's rings, and she custom-designs. "Send me a photo of your childhood home or fantasy house and I'll interpret it in silver." Griebel's rings are light, wearable and unbeatably charming. [*Milatanyagriebel.com.*] ■

Susan Schnur

Face Me

fiction by ELENA SIGMAN

Lori follows Sharon down the sunlit hall and into the bathroom, dim as a cave. She wants the makeover Sharon promised, even though it's Shabbes and they're not supposed to touch makeup. Sharon's family doesn't snap electric switches on Shabbes, and using cosmetics, as far as Lori can tell, might potentially be even more forbidden than turning on a light. But Sharon says a lot of things you're not supposed to do on Shabbes you can do if it's to get a husband. In an hour their youth group starts. The younger kids play games and sing in the synagogue, but Sharon and Lori will stand out back, in the alley, talking to the seventh grade boys. Sharon says Ronny G. will be there.

"Is makeup ok to get a boyfriend, or only for a husband?" Lori asks.

Sharon raises an eyebrow and says, "One thing leads to another," and they crack up. That's what the rebbetzins at their Orthodox day school say to their all-girls class about why they can't dance with boys: one thing leads to another.

The bathroom curtains are drawn across the windows on the far wall, and one small nightlight burns in the corner, a bulb behind a frosted glass shield that stays on from sundown Friday until Saturday night. The thick air smells of talc and potpourri roses and chlorine floating up the driveway from the pool in the backyard. As her eyes adjust, Lori walks up to the mirror that covers an entire wall of the bathroom, floor to ceiling. She is so tall the feeble light catches under her chin, showing her neck and jawbone and cheek on the right side, while her nose sends a dark shadow looping over her left eye and forehead. The left side looks dark, hollow, maybe sexy. Lori isn't sure which side to like. She doesn't like either.

"You left the door open," Sharon says, going back to shut it. The lock clicks.

Lori is suddenly thirsty, drought-thirsty. She doesn't wear makeup, not really. Only lip gloss. She peers into the dimness and sees the sink; the nightlight glints off the chrome handles. At home she'd just drink from the faucet, but it seems tacky here. She can't do it in front of Sharon.

"C'mon," Sharon says. "What are you waiting for?"

Lori goes to the counter that spans the far wall, where plastic compacts and shiny tubes of mascara and lipstick fill a three-foot Lucite tray. The only places she has seen this much makeup are Robinson's and May Co. Perfume bottles, the ambers and caramels, stand at the back of the tray. A crystal bottle casts faint rainbows on the pink-and-gold wallpaper in the half-light.

At Lori's house, her mom keeps all her makeup in one drawer. Weekdays, before her mom heads for work at the library, she puts two streaks of Sheer Apricot across her lips. On Friday nights, while Lori sits on the edge of the tub and watches, her mom unloads the drawer and puts on Cheryl Tiegs Covergirl Clean makeup. Then her mom and dad drive off for their weekly date. They don't care about Shabbes.

Sharon opens a drawer with brushes and combs, compartments for barrettes, hair bands, bobby pins. She quickly clips her bangs back, pinning loops of feathered brown hair to her scalp. Sharon's done this a million times before, including on Shabbes, no big deal.

Bobby pins slide right out of Lori's wispy hair. Jabbing one against her scalp, Lori grimaces in the wall-mirror, taking in her head-to-toe wrongness. The straps on her new wraparound skirt tie at the waist in a protruding knot. Ridges have formed over her belly, and her skirt pockets bulge, where her blouse is tucked in. In the same reflection she sees Sharon lean across the counter, her long plaid skirt smooth across her hips. There is nothing lumpy on Sharon.

Sharon uses her thumb and index fingernails to wiggle the stopper out of a bottle of Chanel No. 5. It's a sample in a tiny glass tube, like something scientific. She positions the tube against her index finger and turns it over once, twice.

"Smell this," Sharon says. She holds her palm up, fingers extended as if she is giving Lori something. Lori breathes the air over Sharon's empty hand, careful not to let her nose touch. The scent is rich, dizzying, warm as another body in the room.

Lori pulls back. "Won't your mom be mad if we use her stuff?"

Sharon tilts her head so her long hair swings out of the way as she touches a place just under her right ear. "Nah," she says. She shifts her head to the left and dabs behind the other ear. "She

"AFTER SHOWER" BY ELENA ZOLOTNITSKY. COURTESY OF SELBY FLEETWOOD GALLERY.

won't know. We'll leave while my parents are asleep." She gives Lori a sly smile. "Or whatever they're doing."

"Ew," Lori giggles. "Gross."

Sharon's mom, dark-haired and slender, shorter than Sharon, grew up in Morocco. She can yell at Sharon in French and English, and she doesn't care if Lori hears, but Sharon's dad is the scary one. He pinches Lori's cheek in greeting, or squeezes her hand so hard she can't feel her fingertips, and he keeps his blue eyes steady on hers the whole time, as if his eyes don't know what his hands are doing. He is tall and the fedora he wears on Shabbes makes him even taller, but he has no neck. His head sits right on top of his suit collar, over his round chest and belly, like a little ball on top of a big one. Before lunch he carefully hangs his hat and jacket, laying his tie over one shoulder. Then he cuffs his shirtsleeves as far as they will go around his thick forearms. He has numbers on one arm from when he was a boy, in Germany. Lori passes him the chicken and the spicy carrots without looking at his face, so she doesn't have to see his freaky blue eyes, but then she ends up staring at his arms instead. Which is still better than thinking about him with Sharon's mother during their Shabbes nap.

"You can't do makeup without perfume," Sharon says. She drags her index finger in a long line up the inside of Lori's right arm, wrist to elbow. It gives Lori a chill, like a fingernail on a blackboard, though there's no sound, just the feeling that shifts magically from her arm to her spine. "There," says Sharon. "Now we're ready."

Lori examines a compact with filigreed gold ribbons and pearls encrusted on the top. The white powder pressed inside is so fine it shimmers, as if it were made of pulverized glass.

Sharon gets to work like a pro. Her elbow carves a sideways arc in the air as she applies mascara. She stands two inches from the mirror and paints black liquid eyeliner inside her lower lids. Isn't that going to smear on her eyeballs, Lori wonders, tapping the compact on the counter, making a small pile of white glitter-dust. But of course the liner won't run. Everything stays where Sharon puts it.

"Crack that powder and you're dead," says Sharon, picking up a blush. "That's my mom's favorite." She shakes the brush to get rid of the extra blush before sweeping it across her cheeks. Under Sharon's olive skin the cheekbones show without rouge, but the added pink makes them seem to be moving, rippling. She takes the pad from the gold-and-pearl compact and sweeps up the powder Lori left on the counter. Then Sharon fake smiles with her teeth showing and circles the lipstick around her mouth. Twice. "Like it?" Sharon asks, pausing to judge.

Her face is a glowing oval of color. Her chin comes to a point like the bottom of a heart.

"Oh god," Lori says. "Totally gorgeous!"

"Thank you, dahling," Sharon says in her fake British accent. Then she appraises Lori. "Let's do something about you." She opens a bottle of liquid foundation. Lori stares at the foam pad in Sharon's hand coming closer and closer to her face until her eyes cross, and the pad blurs to a white and grey blob. She smells the bouquet of perfume at Sharon's wrist, and under that Nivea hand cream, and something sharper, tangy—nail polish remover?

Sharon takes out the blue mascara. She stands on tiptoe. "You're such a giraffe," she says.

"Thanks a lot!" Lori huffs. "I love you, too!"

"Good for kissing tall boy-ohs," Sharon sings.

Lori snorts. "As if there were any at Ezra Academy!" But they both know there is one: Ronny G. How can Sharon be so sure he'll show up at their youth group today? She turns suddenly, wanting to ask Sharon, wanting to know, but the mascara wand stabs her eye.

"Ow," she says, staggering away from Sharon, blinking madly.

"Stop fidgeting!" Sharon sighs. "There's only one way this is going to work." She pushes the makeup aside and sits on the counter.

"Now come here." Sharon takes Lori's wrists and pulls her close. Lori's belly bumps into Sharon's legs, and she sucks in her breath to make it flat.

"That's better," Sharon says. She stares at Lori, and Lori blinks. Where is she supposed to look? Until she realizes that Sharon isn't really gazing into her eyes. Sharon focuses somewhere north of Lori's eyeballs as she saturates the arc of skin between brow and lash with acquamarine. Lori can stare all she wants—Sharon doesn't notice. She studies Sharon's green irises, the threads of gold in them like tiny veins, the dilated pupils. There are whole maps of Sharon she's never seen, the slightly indented circles of skin around her nostrils, a tiny velvet mole that summits from Sharon's smooth, tanned cheek. But the truth about Ronny doesn't show.

Then Sharon grips the back of her head. "Hold steady," Sharon says, maneuvering a rollerball lip gloss around Lori's mouth, getting the syrupy color inside the line of lip pencil. This is what Lori loves: Sharon knows exactly what to do.

"Go mwahh," Sharon says, and Lori smacks her lips.

Sharon opens a powder blush. She puts her hand under Lori's chin, tips her head back.

Lori feels floaty with her head tilted. She closes her eyes and breathes in the smell of Sharon-Chanel. The nightlight makes a bright spot in the dark field behind her left eyelid. Her skin warms under the tickle of the blush brush. She can predict Sharon's butterfly strokes across her cheeks, anticipating the rhythm. Then Lori lets go. She lets go the bathroom, lets go time. Lets go her belly, which settles against Sharon's knees as the air rushes in. She pretends, for a moment, that the fingers on her chin are Ronny's, that he has tilted her head back to kiss her, that the light stream of breath blowing across her neck belongs to him. But she knows he won't smell as good as Sharon, as creamy and perfume-y. Sometimes Lori stands in line behind

Sharon works like a pro. Of course her eyeliner won't run. Everything stays where Sharon puts it.

Ronny at the water fountain, or in the playground, waiting to play handball. He smells like pizza.

Sharon releases her chin. She hops off the counter and leads Lori to the mirror. "What do you think?"

Lori stares. She looks beautiful—is beautiful. She looks the way she dreams she looks.

It's not any one element, not the dark lashes that make her eyes pop out or the luminous cheeks or the outline of her pink mouth—though these items are essential, Lori sees, not one can be dispensed with—but the totality, the way the face has been taken apart and reassembled into something new.

Lori wheels around, giddy, and throws her arms around Sharon in a bear hug. Lori wants to say something, to say thank you, but the words aren't right so she kisses Sharon.

It's a fast kiss, a smooth lip-second, but long enough for Lori to taste the mineral flavor—is it her lipstick? Sharon's?—so delicious, like pennies but warm.

She likes the way Sharon feels, her slim shoulders, the softness of her breasts. All that is familiar from a hundred hugs before this one. What surprises Lori are the things she's never imagined. The swell of Sharon's bottom lip. How close Sharon's tongue is, its mobility and heat, just on the other side of her lips. What's surprising is that Sharon hasn't pulled back.

It's Lori who lets go. Her neck is hot. She turns to the counter where the makeup is scattered and hunts for something, peeking sideways to see if Sharon's eyes have narrowed to slits the way they do when she's mad. But in fact Sharon stands there, staring at her with curiosity, like Lori's in the middle of telling a story and Sharon's waiting to hear how it ends.

"Whadya do that for?" Sharon says.

"Um, nothing." Lori picks up the big gold compact again, thinks about sliding it into her pocket. Puts it down on the counter instead. "Sorry," she says, though she isn't.

"Whatever," Sharon says.

There's a knock on the door. "Sharon? Are you in there?" her father asks.

In a sweeping motion, arms colliding, both girls turn suddenly toward the door, as if it were about to open. Two lipsticks and the gold compact hit the floor with a clatter.

"What's going on?" her father asks. His W sounds like an ominous V.

"We're doing our hair," Sharon says. "Almost done."

"I vant you out," he says.

"O-Kay-ay," Sharon replies. "Be right out."

In the silence, breathing is impossible. Then the heavy footsteps fade down the hall.

Instantly, Sharon is on the ground, tweezing shards of the glittering, compressed powder between her fingers as gently as broken glass. She deposits them in the bottom half of the gold case as if they were puzzle pieces, as if her mother wouldn't notice the jigsaw cracks.

Who knocked it off the counter, Lori wonders. Not that it matters; even if she didn't do it, she did.

"Take off your makeup," Sharon hisses. "Hurry!"

Lori goes to the mirror. The wraparound skirt still doesn't work, her blouse is too tight, but it will be ok, she can talk to Ronny, if she can keep her face. She crosses her arms.

"No," she says, "I'm not taking it off."

"What do you mean?" Sharon's voice is high and strange, almost pleading. "You have to," she says. "You can't let my dad see you like that."

"I don't care," Lori says.

Sharon stares at her—not directly, but at the Lori in the mirror. Now Sharon's eyes turn to slits. The mirror has some kind of magnifying effect, concentrating the beam of Sharon's rage so that it burns Lori.

"Fine," Sharon says, her voice hard. "I'll tell my parents the makeup was your idea."

"I don't care." Lori whispers it this time. Her stomach twists as she speaks.

Sharon arranges tubes on the pearly tray. "And I'm not going to youth group today. You go without me." The lipsticks click as she fits the halves together.

Lori feels the powdery air turn heavy. Moving at all is like walking through water, and she swims slowly to the counter. "I don't want to go without you," she says.

"Then go home."

Lori glances at the mirror again. The makeup is still on but her face looks different. Darker. "Where's the remover?"

Sharon passes her a bottle, and Lori puts some of the thick cream on a tissue. She makes slow, robotic circles on her cheeks, over her eyelids. The tissue is quickly sodden and her face turns a blur of blue and black, like a painting left in the rain.

"What are you doing?" Sharon says. "You can't take it off either, can you?" She holds the makeup remover upside down and shakes a blob of cream onto a fresh tissue.

"Face me," she says.

Lori turns right away. This is the sound of the usual Sharon, the bossy confidence, the Sharon she is used to. Sharon bends Lori's head forward and she keeps it there; she does what Sharon tells her. The first stroke of cream feels cool on her skin but Sharon wipes gruffly, over and over, till her cheeks begin to blaze. Sharon strips the blush, the foundation, the mascara, the shadow. Lori squeezes her eyes shut, telling herself don't. Don't cry.

"Almost done," Sharon says, as she swipes at stray bits of color. Lori knows without looking that her old self is back in place. She keeps her eyes closed because if she doesn't open them she can still see her gorgeous reflection in her mind. The made-up face is truer than the plain. But that doesn't matter now. After they restack the compacts and stand the rows of lipsticks at attention, they will re-emerge into Sharon's house, the world of Sharon's parents, the dazzling sunlight where Shabbes rules instead of the dim bathroom where it is suspended.

Sharon stops wiping. Lori opens her eyes. The only color left is at her lips and the contrast against the rest of her skin makes them look thicker, suffused with blood and turning red-gold in the nightlight glow. Sharon reaches for a fresh tissue. Fast, before Sharon can clear her lips, Lori licks them, top and bottom. ■

This story is a chapter in Elena Sigman's novel-in-stories. Her fiction has been published in Little Star and Orim: A Jewish Journal at Yale. Her essays have appeared in Salon and elsewhere, including the anthology Dog Is My Co-Pilot: Great Writers on the World's Oldest Friendship.

my WELFARE MOM, our FOOD STAMPS & why I'M A MARGINAL JEW

by ANDREA KOTT

"Do you think you could leave some more toilet paper next time?" The girl hollered from across the crowded school cafeteria. I didn't know her or the other girls at her table, but I knew the request was meant for me: I cleaned the bathrooms in their dorm five mornings a week. I was on line for the salad bar, trying to duck the growing attention by examining the scuff marks on my shoes. But she fired the question again and, like a torpedo, it found me. "Heyyy," she yelled. "Tomorrow: Could you leave a couple extra rolls?"

It was the first week of my freshman year at Brandeis University. I had applied to the elite, predominantly Jewish, East Coast school because it was a fine university and I figured I had a good shot at financial aid, being a low-income Jew with a 4.0. In fact, Brandeis practically paid me to come; except for the chunk of aid I had to earn through work-study. I chose the highest-paying job that took the least amount of time. Every morning I heaved a steel bucket up and down four flights, toting sponges, disinfectants, rubber gloves and a mop with toilet paper rolls skewered on the handle. From 6 to 9, I scrubbed, mopped, polished and wiped away graffiti and the remains of recent bulimic purges. It felt awkward cleaning up after my classmates as they tweezed their eyebrows and curled their hair. It certainly didn't help me feel welcomed or accepted the way I'd thought I would, among other freshmen, most of us Jewish and away from home for the first time. I felt like an outsider.

I should have anticipated as much. Months earlier, when my letter of acceptance and registration materials had arrived on Brandeis letterhead—blue-and-white with Hebrew writing—I began doubting whether I belonged at a school with such a strong Jewish legacy. I had always connected being Jewish with material wealth and privilege, attending Hebrew school and becoming bat mitzvah. As the daughter of a single, alcoholic mother who lived on welfare, I hadn't grown up with any of these things. In fact, I grew up knowing more Christmas carols than Friday night prayers in a home that defied every stereotypical notion of what being Jewish was about.

My Jewish experience began and ended with a few unexplained rituals: eating sugar-dipped challah on Rosh Hashanah, lighting yahrzeit candles on Yom Kippur and sipping Manischewitz spritzers during seders. Even though my mother had grown up in a traditional Jewish home, by the time I was born, whatever meaning the tradition had once held for her was gone. Ten years earlier, at age 29, she had been widowed with two young sons; in her subsequent marriage to my father, she had been battered. When she fled him—with the three of us kids in tow—survival was her sole preoccupation. Terror and depression nearly paralyzed her. Her way of coping: two Scotches at dinnertime, earlier on weekends. A psychiatrist had prescribed tranquilizers to replace the Scotch. My mother found they worked better together.

UNTIL I WAS SIX, WE LIVED IN MY LATE GRANDMOTHER'S two-family house, in Queens, New York. When my half-brothers left home for college, my mother sold the house, because it was expensive to maintain. She drank more, she worked less, and we moved from one apartment to the next, always in search of cheaper rent. We managed to live in Jewish neighborhoods, but my mother's drinking and our relative poverty made me different from other Jewish kids. We couldn't afford synagogue membership, so I didn't attend Hebrew school or even think about becoming bat mitzvah. There were no mezuzot inside our doorframes, or kosher dishes in our kitchen. We served milk with meat, ate scallops when they went on sale and fried bacon on Sunday morning. We made no distinction between the sacred

ARTWORK BY HOLLIE CHASTAIN

and the ordinary. Friday night dinner welcomed Shabbat in my friends' homes but was like any other in mine, with the clink of ice in my mother's cocktail breaking the silence.

Although I made friends readily, I avoided inviting them over because I dreaded the prospect of my mother answering the door with too many Scotches in her, slurring and reeking. I never discussed her drinking or divulged that the canned goods in our kitchen cupboards came from the school's Thanksgiving food drive, which supplemented our monthly allowance of food stamps and government cheese. I did eventually conclude, however, that being Jewish was everything I was not.

Relief came at the end of seventh grade, when my mother moved us across the country to a non-Jewish, working class community in San Diego, to be near her only brother. Since most of the families in our new neighborhood were barely scraping by, blending in was easy. As the only Jew my new friends had ever met, I was a curiosity, but no longer a misfit, especially once I persuaded my mother to let me have a Christmas tree. I stayed in California until I left for college. Living there was the only time I did not feel ashamed. Going to Brandeis undid all that, which is why I made my first year there my last.

My feelings about being Jewish—or not—came and went during the next 15 years. Denying them was easy around non-Jews. "I'm nothing," I would respond when asked about my religion. "I was *born* Jewish, but I'm really nothing." But rejecting the fact of my Jewishness felt oddly painful among Jewish friends who loved the tradition for the guidance and wisdom it provided. In their company, I felt connected yet alienated, envious and confused. By blood I was Jewish. In my mind, however, I was an imposter: a low-class, white-trash welfare kid who had never learned enough about Judaism to claim it as a birthright. What would it take for me to feel like I belonged? My mother's death, my marriage and, above all, motherhood made me to want to try.

I HADN'T GROWN UP WITH THE LANGUAGE OF PRAYER, but something about these major and life-altering lifecycle events made me want to pray. I craved the words and rituals that had guided generations through grief, sanctified marriages and blessed children. I began reading and trying to learn the prayers and basic tenets of Judaism. I said kaddish for my mother and married a similarly conflicted, nonobservant Jew under a huppah. When Sophie, our first child, was born, I vowed not to pass on the ignorance and shame that had informed my own pained Jewish identity. When she turned five, we joined a Reform synagogue and enrolled her in Hebrew School. *It is important to know who you are*, I told Sophie and her little brother, Ben, whenever they complained about going. *You are Jewish. It is your heritage. Question it. Struggle with it. Reject it, if you must. But know what you're rejecting.*

As for myself, I tried to make living Jewishly my new normal. I joined a Torah study group and learned to read Hebrew. I encouraged Friday night family synagogue attendance, volunteered for social action projects, joined the b'nai mitzvah tutoring carpool, sang in the temple choir and exchanged *Shabbat Shaloms* with fellow congregants.

I expected this new involvement to give me the feeling of legitimacy I had longed for, and I waited for my newly adopted Jewishness to become a second skin. Instead, it gave me a feeling of déjà vu: Here I was again, unable to afford a temple membership. Although my husband and I were not remotely poor the way I had been growing up, we would never have the money to be full-price congregants. The temple's offer of a special financial "arrangement," rather than making me feel valued, rekindled the shame I felt watching my mother collect food stamps and government cheese. And even though the temple assured us that we were not the only low-income members, the diamond-clad women who filled the sanctuary on Friday nights made me feel otherwise; like I could never be worthy of the tribe.

Nevertheless, I was determined to instill in my children a sense of pride about being Jewish, and somehow I succeeded. At age 13, after completing their mandatory Jewish education, both Sophie and Ben chose to become b'nai mitzvah. We fully expected the turmoil and distractions of adolescence to dampen their interest in Judaism afterward. Indeed, at 15, Ben is nursing an age-appropriate cynicism toward any suggestion of religion or spirituality. Not Sophie. For her, Judaism has become more important. She loves the tradition, belonging to our Jewish community and observing the High Holidays. A social activist, she loves knowing that performing mitzvot is part of her covenant with God. And, she loves Israel, despite its troubled existence, where she spent the summer before her junior year in high school.

> Living in a non-Jewish working-class neighborhood was the only time I did not feel ashamed. Brandeis undid all that.

"I want to go back, and I want you and Dad to come," she cried when she returned. Her tears were of longing, not only to resume the deep connection she had found, but for us to share it with her.

I AM HEARTENED THAT SOPHIE IS FREE OF THE CONFLICTS about Judaism that have plagued me. When she attends college in the fall, regardless of the work-study job she takes, her experience of being Jewish will be different from mine. It will neither burden nor isolate her, perhaps because it was allowed to flourish.

I don't know if my impoverished childhood is all that undergirds my ambivalence toward Judaism, or if my conflict also stems from my embarrassment over how much I don't know, or from my feminist discomfort with the liturgy. I do know that, after more than a decade, self-consciousness continues to cripple me. I go through the motions of chanting prayers and observing rituals, watching myself watch myself, feeling like a fraud.

Someday I hope to be like Sophie, at home in my Jewish skin. In the meantime, I can only trust that in Judaism, with its invitation to question and doubt, my struggle has its place. ■

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Kosher

fiction by SUSAN DICKMAN

It had begun innocently enough, over a jar of Baco-Bits in among the canned soup and vermicelli collected in a box that the synagogue had placed in the church lobby it rented for a food drive during the high holidays. She had been dropping off macaroni and cheese made from organic semolina and Vermont cheddar, a brand which had given her pause in the supermarket as she decided which was ethically worse, giving away a brand she would never feed her own children or appearing elitist by donating the organic variety when the regular would do. In the end she decided that either way she would be keeping herself awash in liberal guilt, so she opted to spend the extra money and know that she actively cared about some poor child's diet. The Baco-Bits had attracted her attention and were still in her hand when the man with the rumpled shirt, salt and pepper curls, and a scholar's beard, a man whose head and neck she had acquired detailed knowledge of during the service the evening before, leaned over the donation box, took her hand as if gesturing for the time, and turned her naked wrist to read the jar's label.

They had had a good laugh over that later, the story of Baco-Bits appearing in the synagogue food drive bin. They debated it for weeks after they had started seeing one another, the salad toppers popping up out of nowhere as a topic of scrutiny, as stand-in for whatever else not discussed. But that was at the beginning when there were no taboo subjects. He would emerge from the shower, a towel half-wrapped around himself to ask her, damp curls dripping, and reaching for the glasses on her dresser, his accent drawing out the open vowels, "But how is it that Baco-Bits are even kosher?"

The question would linger and she would answer him, hours or weeks later as he knelt to repair his bicycle, or while ordering dessert, or mulling over the movie section on a Saturday afternoon, "What is amazing is that they have managed to convince the devout that they crave the taste of bacon made from dehydrated vegetable protein."

Sometimes a related question would emerge from one or another to hang in the air, essentially unanswerable. "Given the century we are in, is it the pork flavor that is most forbidden, the animal itself, or the mere idea?" Or, "How do you think it would be interpreted if congregants started showing up with tinned hams?"

They were both well into their forties, and without realizing it he had rather vainly assumed that he would not be attracted to a woman his age. He had been single for three years, not because he was permanently wounded from the quiet divorce he and his wife had inevitably come to once the twins began high school, but because he didn't imagine being interested in love again. Work had taken him across the ocean and his girls were back home, growing up without him there to watch. He regularly heard their voices trans-Atlantic and exchanged emails several times a week but that kind of contact could not provide him with what he longed to witness again, the slow crawl and knit of their lengthening bones, their silences and teenage rages, straggly hair pushed out of their eyes, elusive smiles and clever, biting commentary about life among the barbarians. And although he had always considered the move temporary, he knew well enough the draw of a steady economy, geopolitical stability, and the appealing anonymity of life in a large American city.

And then he had met a woman over a jar of Baco-Bits. One morning he woke and sat alternately reading a novel and taking breaks from it to stare at her sleeping form and the morning sun painting her face, illuminating her. He said aloud, in English, knowing that she wouldn't hear it, "It has been so long since I have even liked anyone, and here you are. And you, I love." She opened her eyes and seemed to be looking at him, but he knew she had simply entered another state of waking and was still essentially asleep. She had all her life woken that way, in a hard place; he could imagine a dense, difficult childhood. "It's only me," he had said, and brought her back to earth.

She teased him about his inability to admit to love. "It's not a disease," she would say calmly, pouring coffee. "It's not a curse, something to be ashamed of." But he would flap his newspaper or lean forward to touch her cheek and explain that he had grown up in the face of war and death. What he remembered most vividly was the adults in states of constant agitation, that when they weren't on edge and shouting at the children (this was a kibbutz, you remember, he would say with gravity, and so we slept apart from the parents, in separate houses) they were plying them with sweets and trinkets. And when that happened he knew that the situation was truly terrible.

"When the milk and cookies were brought out?"

"When my father's hand came down on my bottom for crying from fear," he would answer patiently. "We just didn't speak of love. We loved but lived differently, in separate places."

HELENA WURZEL, "DOUBT," 14"X16", OIL ON CANVAS, 2011

When he spoke that way she often had the feeling he was exaggerating. But she knew that everything he told her was true in some regard, and that he was not asking for sympathy. No sad story of his could make her pity him; he was not the type to inspire such emotion.

He was born in Austria but his parents had immigrated to Palestine when he was three, and he had spent his childhood at a settlement in a valley near Nazareth. At night with the stars at his window he went to sleep, motionless beneath a thin blanket, listening for the sounds of church bells and the muezzin across the valley, the mews of sheep filling the spaces between hills. He described secret places where he took girls to make love, places hidden between the pines, little makeshift forts that they would fill with wildflowers. They carried bread and cheese and olives, a canteen of water; once they found an abandoned beehive and broke it open to taste the dripping honeycomb. Black snakes darted out from between rocks in the hot midday sun. One afternoon before he went into the army a young Arab boy discovered him and a girlfriend sleeping naked like Adam and Eve on a bed of pine needles. He woke them with his laughter, then went running back to his village.

"You are the snake," she teased him when she heard that tale. "You knew nothing of women then, and even less now." She pulled his hair for emphasis. He had taken to wearing it long in back, out of style past his ears, but somehow it didn't look silly.

"Did you know," she asked him one afternoon, peering at the clock—her son due in from college, her daughter returning from orchestra practice—"that I once visited your kibbutz?"

He sat up on an elbow to face her. His reminiscing had led him down a winding path of words until he had felt on the verge of sleep. They had been together for six months and spoke of many things. And yet there was always a familiar silence between them, as if they knew each other well even when they really didn't. They had moved quickly from lovers to feeling, in addition, like family. They often mused that what was between them felt comfortably incestuous.

"My kibbutz?" They had breathed the same air, in a different time? Her shoes had kicked up the same dust? She had seen his childhood world through her eyes, many years past?

"Of course. It's not far from where I worked on the moshav on the other side of the valley. I thought I had told you." She drew her fingers across his back, noting his age-freckled skin, the shape of his torso. "I drove there with my cousins to visit friends. Up through Wadi Ara, in between the villages with their white stone houses and laundry hanging outside. Donkeys beneath trees, dozing." Her voice grew soft.

He liked it that she knew something about his country, more than the flavor of the cities or where to find the cleanest beaches and best hummus. She had been in ugly places, dusty towns heavy with grief, and knew the dirt of the region. She feigned indifference towards politics, refusing to toe any party line or become embroiled in casual discussions. When asked she would shrug and say her views were private and that in any case, history would have nothing to do with what she believed. For her it was all about the senses, and what she treasured about her time there provided him with stories that fit neatly into his own memory, ready to be taken out and recalled bits at a time.

He fell silent and didn't ask for the name of the family in whose house she had visited or what she had thought of his childhood surroundings. He didn't ask, *and did you walk near the stream that edged out from the kibbutz border, and did you follow it to my parent's house, the last cottage before the forest begins?* Of course she wouldn't have known about any of that; that was years before she met him. He listened as she told him how at the entrance to the kibbutz a huge black bull had leaned across the gate to lick the windshield of their car. How in the home of her cousins' friends they made crêpes and salad and she listened to the different strands of conversation. How it felt like rain drizzling down softly, and she knew that if she chose to she could pay attention to any piece of it or ignore it. That the sounds of the afternoon with its multi-layered conversations had become a touchstone for her in her memory of those years. At some point the door had opened and children came pouring in. A dark eyed boy sat drawing pictures with her and jumped into her arms when it was time to go, begging her not to leave. She promised him that she would visit again, although she knew she would never manage to.

> She had the gift of seeing how things were between people, long before the people themselves did.

"Don't you want to ask me their names?" she mused. "You must know the family. Let's see if I can remember; the boy, I believe, was named Razi…" But he shook his head; it was enough for him to be witness to her remembrance of the car ride through the valley towards his childhood home from years before.

At first she enjoyed his appreciation of her memories, but in time she found that feeding him that way made her hungry for the other life she had for a time inhabited. She had spent two years picking oranges and milking cows, crossing borders to observe and capture the world she saw around her. She was going to become a photographer, a journalist, an artist. After she left, the years away became smaller, a blip in time, a mere something else she had lived before abruptly turning around to go back to New Jersey.

What was it, she found herself thinking, working back to it in her mind after meeting him. What was the catalyst that had made her return to her hometown? Her father had fallen ill, and her mother begged her back home for a visit. She left reluctantly, leaving books and clothing in a friend's closet. She went assuming that she would return, yet knowing on some level that she couldn't pick oranges and wander around forever. Within a year her father died, and then her mother, from nerves and heartbreak.

She knew her mother would have liked him. His sharp intellect and quiet manner, his old world grace and business skills, the gentle voice in which he addressed the girl. Her mother had been a simple woman, deeply superstitious and from an Orthodox family, but after arriving in America she had blossomed, discarding what did not suit her and following only the tenets of the religion that made her happy. She had an intuitive sense of the network of emotions beneath the ordinary surfaces of people. She was subtle but called a spade a spade and did not mince words when confronting something she didn't understand, or understood too well. Her mother possessed a knowledge that she would never have, a way through the winding dark forest of emotions. She had the gift of seeing the way things were between people long before the people themselves did.

"Look at that," her mother would murmur as if deciphering the vestiges of some remote language. "Not kosher. The way they're acting, something's not right." She would overhear her mother at a family gathering, a wedding or bar mitzvah, watch her observing the hidden hieroglyphs imperceptible to everyone else that would occur months before the news of an impending divorce, bankruptcy, or conflict erupted. But she saw the flip side just as often, pronouncing sound the situations and relationships that seemed to others off-kilter. Healthy, kosher, she would state. Aboveboard and bound for success. And her mother was right so often that it became a family in-joke.

So she had left, abandoned the newly formed moshav, returned to her parents, and begun college. Then she met her husband. Graduate school and a few years of teaching before the babies arrived. She stayed home for years, swathed in a yellow-tinged haze of chubby knees and diapers, milk-stained visions, lack of sleep. She tutored and stole moments in between her tasks to take her camera out on weekends, scouring the city for stories, looking into people's faces to read their joys and griefs, walking the streets of her childhood. She had felt mostly satisfied. Even the marriage had ended rather undramatically, a decision arrived at mutually. The years closed around her, swiftly. And then opened.

Once the summer ended, all at once there was the question of where to sleep. Suddenly each decision felt weighty, freighted with meaning. He would go to work and return to his apartment to collect mail, arriving at her place in time to sit with her daughter at the kitchen table as she did her homework. Once he pressed his palm to the girl's shoulder, imagining his own daughters asleep in the space of time they inhabited across the ocean. Now and then when he telephoned he would close his eyes, trying to recall the quality and timbre of their voices when they were very young. Then his ex-wife would get on the line and in the exchange of small talk, he sometimes forgot that they had separated.

In November he visited the girls and slept on the sofa while his ex-wife and lover slept in the next room. He cooked dinner, concocted elaborate spreads from items brought from New York, kept them up into the wee hours, accompanied the girls to films and parties. Each night he found himself awake, and he wasn't sure whether it was the silence arriving like an incurable disease in the middle of the night, or the patter of the lover's footsteps crossing the bedroom floor, or the distance between his memories and what now composed his life that so disturbed his sleep.

He returned to New York. They settled in for the winter and watched snow falling outside her window. They spoke of escaping to an island, fantasized about warm waters and clean sand, but in the end they decided to shelve the idea until next year. Even saying the words "next year" made him freeze with a sort of wonder and terror he had not recognized since childhood, and for days he kept his silence. One evening she asked if there was anything to discuss, and he hesitated but said no and began preparing dinner. He was slippery. But her daughter had grudgingly begun to admit him into her private world, and as he cooked, she wandered into the kitchen and let slip a detail about a boy she liked, which thrilled him.

They passed the frozen season, working steadily and waiting for the ice to break on the pond at the park down the street where young people congregated to skate in the approaching dark. Her daughter joined them some days, and they watched as she slung a pair of battered skates across her shoulders and snuck matches from a box on the stove on the way out the door so she could smoke as she walked home in the dark with the crowd.

Then slowly the ground began to thaw and buds formed on the trees lining their street. They sipped their coffee and read the newspapers that spring, silently wondering at the strangeness of their having even met. But sensing there were no answers to the questions that lingered—how is it that people connect, anyway? and can love last?—they broached them less frequently, satisfied with what was. In May his lease was up, and he moved into her place without fanfare or discussion. They arranged household chores, divided the bills, and created schedules for shopping and cooking. Within weeks the sunporch was converted to a shared office, desks posted beneath windows at opposite ends of the tiny space, and rows of books between. They rode bicycles together and decided to take up Indian cooking, her daughter chopping vegetables as they studied the cookbooks they had found at the library.

One midsummer evening while cleaning out the front closet, she found her camera, dusty with age. It was an ancient model adopted from the collection in her father's dresser, a note still scotch-taped to the back with shutter speeds and f-stops for various films and light conditions written in his own terse hand. The night before she had left for the moshav instead of college, to his great disappointment, he grudgingly chose a camera for her from his collection. Now as she held it in her hands, the years unraveled and she recalled her travels. She turned the camera over and absently cranked the film advance lever to find there were frames left on the roll. They had to be decades old, and she wondered what she would find when she had the film developed. She looked around the living room to see her daughter curled up on the sofa lost in a book, while he stood watching a game of catch outside the window, the hint of a smile on his serious face. She put the viewfinder to her eye to capture what was there. ■

Susan Dickman received Illinois Arts Council Awards for fiction and poetry, had a Pushcart Prize-nominated poem in 2003's Best American Poetry, *and has published memoir and poetry in Intellectual Refuge, LiterBug, and Zocalo Public Square. She recently completed a young adult novel and works as a teacher in Chicago.*

HOW MY DAUGHTER BECAME MY SON

A MOTHER SEES HER CHILD THROUGH **GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY**

by JUDY SENNESH

In retrospect, I have no idea why I was drawn to buy and devour Amy Bloom's beautiful collection of short stories, *A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You.* Not only did I buy it; but I also sent E. a copy at school, telling her how wonderful it was. This was several years before my child announced she was transgender.

The very first story in the book is about a mother accompanying her child for sexual reassignment surgery. That story still brings tears to my eyes because it's all about the power of unconditional love for our children.

E. started the conversation about being transgender by leaving her copy of the very same book on my bed with a Post-It saying, "This is about me, except for the bottom surgery. We need to talk."

Truth be told, I had been dreading this announcement for about two years. Historically, E. had communicated things about herself, and her life, by talking about people other than herself. I imagine it was a way of seeing how I reacted before she spilled the real beans all over the floor.

When E. finally told me about her decision, she'd been doing research for a long time and came to me with a plan in place. This plan included taking off her fall semester to visit friends studying overseas. She had already selected a surgeon for her "top" surgery and had a January appointment tentatively booked at a hospital outside of Chicago. She also informed me that I was *not* coming along on the surgery trip—a very wise move on my wise kid's part. A wonderful friend was going with her and that was that.

We were very lucky to have that summer pretty much to ourselves. I asked all the questions other mothers ask, espe-

cially, "*Why* can't you just be a butch lesbian and forget all this medical stuff?" She explained that gender wasn't the same as sexual orientation: gender is about who you know you are and orientation is about the people you're attracted to. I listened and didn't quite understand, but I made like I did and headed for the Internet. I was calm, in fact, I was so calm that she kept telling me I had to find a shrink because I couldn't possibly be so OK.

But actually, the more I read, and the more people I reached out to, the better I felt. Suddenly her past behavior started to make sense. My very smart kid had been having a hard time at school, had been experiencing insomnia, and had been put on mood-stabilizing medication. It was frightening for me to see my formerly focused, outgoing child hide in her bedroom and become more sullen as the days passed. I was the mommy and here was something I couldn't fix—the ultimate failure for a Jewish mother. Could this be what that was all about? Was this the reason she would occasionally tell me she was "different" from other people in our family while she was growing up, but would never explain why? And, was this why she had come to me at least three times when she was much younger to ask if she could change her name, and the new, proposed names were all gender-neutral, like Pat, Lee, or Ricky? Who would have ever guessed that these were attempts to tell me that she was, in her brain and heart, my son and not my daughter? At the time, it was too far off my radar to even be considered as a possibility.

She told me about the TransKidsFamily website and I joined. Dave Parker, bless his heart, a member of the listserv and then President of PFLAG-TNET (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays-Transgender Network) introduced me to the woman who was the NYC Trans-Coordinator, and we spoke on the phone. She was terrific, and sane, and "normal," which was extremely comforting. I devoured information from any source I could find. I read Jamison Green's terrific book, *Becoming a Visible Man*, and his handsome author photo became my psychic friend.

"CROSSWORD IV," ARTWORK BY JOAN SNITZER, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 2012. COURTESY OF A.I.R. GALLERY

Gender is about who you know you are. Orientation is about the people you're attracted to.

Looming ahead were the hardest days I was to experience: E.'s time abroad traveling though Europe. Here she was, heading for a trip where she would be going through airport security many times, looking very much like a young man. I was almost brought to my knees with terror in those post-9/11 days, when having proper identification was the watchword of everyone's faith. Would she get pulled out of line and interrogated? Humiliated? God forbid, strip-searched?

These were the days I didn't sleep every time I knew she was flying from one city to another. And in the end what happened was...nothing. She was always treated properly and no differently than anyone else. With all the awful stories we hear about gay bashings, and with Matthew Shepard still fresh in the minds of the gay community and their allies, my relief when E. came home was overwhelming.

As that fall drew to an end, there was a consultation with the surgeon on the calendar, which was combined with a trip to visit friends at school. E. came home with very positive feelings about the surgeon and his staff and excited about the surgery. When that date finally arrived, I sat by the phone all day, thinking about every cut, scrape, and bloody injury that my child had ever suffered. I was unable to bear the thought that someone was removing parts of her body, and afraid that she would be in pain and suffer. And so it came as a welcome surprise when we spoke that night, and through a slightly medicated haze she said to me, "I feel great, and thank God they're gone!" It was an important turning point for both of us.

The surgery healed well and quickly, and three months later testosterone injections began. We filed for a legal name change for E. at the urging of an attorney friend who said he would step in if we needed him. We didn't. With each new, corrected piece of identification, I rejoiced because I felt my kid was becoming safer and safer in a strange world full of uncharted territory.

The great disappointment was (and continues to be) that we couldn't get a corrected New York City birth certificate. The city had been on the verge of changing its guidelines for transgender people, then backed off at the very last moment—a fight that continues to be

waged. And the most exciting moment came when a new U.S. passport arrived by Priority Mail, with his new, legal name, indicating that E. was male.

Unlike many parents who, with good reason, mourn the loss of a son or daughter when they transition, I've never been to that place. There was a brief time when I felt like my child was slipping away from me, going through something I didn't understand and couldn't help with. That was terrifying. But I remember the first time someone asked me if I had children and I was able to answer, "Yes, I have two wonderful sons." How very special that felt!

And so, E., who had become a "he" along the way, causing us to grapple with the dreaded pronoun problem, graduated from college with his correct name on his diploma, and with his extended posse of friends fully intact. He stayed with the terrific young woman he'd met in college (when it looked like they were both lesbians) and then got a job as a high school teacher. They were married last summer in a wedding so filled with joy that you can feel the happiness pouring out of the photos.

I believe that transgender people suffer from something akin to a birth defect (although I don't like the word "defect"), and we made a correction. As with many transgender kids, once the corrections are even begun, the depression and other emotional problems start to disappear. I didn't lose my daughter; I got back my smart, resourceful, and caring child, in a very slightly altered form. I couldn't be more grateful. ■

Judy Sennesh, mother of two wonderful sons and their wives, facilitates support groups for PFLAG NYC, one of which is for parents with transgender children.

Excerpted from "A Blessing in Disguise" by Judy Sennesh, in Transitions of the Heart, *edited by Rachel Pepper. Reprinted courtesy of Cleis Press.*

CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENTS

by CATHERINE TUERK

People often ask, "Why do I have to tell people that I have a gay child?" My answer: Most people assume that everyone is straight, and that all our children are straight. It is up to us to help set everyone "straight."

How does a parent come out to acquaintances and the world in general? It doesn't have to be high drama. All you need is a Casual Coming-Out Comment. Often, in response, people will share a story about someone they love who is gay. Casual comments help them begin to come out. The payoff is great! Contrary to popular opinion, it IS everyone's business that families include gay people. Only when gay people can be safe and have full equality will it no longer be everyone's business.

Here are some ideas for things you can say if you have a gay son or daughter.

QUESTION: How's your daughter?
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **Well, you know our daughter is gay and for the first time in her life she is truly happy.**

QUESTION: How was your weekend?
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **We went to Rehoboth. It's such a great place. It's especially nice because it is so welcoming to gay people. And when you have a gay son like we do, you appreciate such things.**

QUESTION: How did you like the election outcome?
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **I'm glad Ms. X won. Our daughter is a lesbian, and Ms. X seems to support the rights of all people.**

QUESTION: How was your vacation?
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **It was wonderful. We went overseas, and since we have a gay son, it is always interesting to see how gays are treated in other cultures.**

QUESTION: What are you doing these days?
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **Well, in addition to my psychotherapy work, we belong to a wonderful organization called PFLAG, which stand for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbian and Gays. It's a great organization where we learn how to support our daughter and advocate for the gay community.**

QUESTION: That's an interesting button: "Homophobia Hurts Families."
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **Thank you. We have a gay son, and my husband and I hope that the next generation of young gay people will have it easier if we can help eradicate homophobia.**

QUESTION: Why do you have a pink triangle on your bank check?
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **I have a gay child and I want to support the gay community in any way I can.**

QUESTION: Why did you leave your synagogue?
CASUAL COMING-OUT COMMENT: **When my son came out as gay, we needed to find an emotionally safe place that was fully affirming and welcoming for gay people and their families.**

Adapted from Mom Knows: Reflections on Love, Gay Pride, and Taking Action *by Catherine Tuerk (2012).*

SABBATH SERVICE

This Sabbath eve you struggle as you enter
rest. Morphine slides shut the doors
and opens them; we glimpse another room,
inside this one, in which you try to give
your name back to the Nameless.
Your parched body closes, you spiral inward,
speaking in consonants without the breath of vowels.

The rabbi sweeps his hand over the congregation
from right to left, and the names of the dying,
the desperate, drop from our lips and fly across
the sanctuary. The yarzeit board shines cold
electric constellations, old loves turned in their
sockets. You will lie on that brass bed in raised
letters; young hands will light you and keep you.

Outside the full moon shuts with a scud of cloud
yielding and rising and yielding to the wind.
I measure time by how you wax and wane;
my Sabbath prayers wind around grief.
For the rest of my life I will rise for you
in the kaddish of the mourner, which is praise,
which is what remains when nothing else remains.

You will not lift your face to me again.
Your last hours turn as I come to the ark.
I open my arms to receive you, the weight
of who you are, completed. You are covered
in silver, breastplate a polished moon.
I take up the pointer to read out your days.
I loose the band that holds the holy scroll.

KRISTIN CAMITTA ZIMET

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LIANA FINCK

MAKE AN INTRODUCTION

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Letdown

fiction by RUTH HOROWITZ

Becca slips out of the library with her blue bag hidden under her arm. She's not having an affair or embezzling the overdue fines. She's on her scheduled lunch hour. And it was Sister Marie Claire herself who showed her the secret room off the stairwell, and gave her the key. And yet, Becca's heart races as she descends the stairs. She hesitates outside the door. When she's sure no one's watching, she turns the lock and enters.

It's like a room from a dream, cavernous and shadowed, the only furniture a wooden chair and a little desk. Subtle grooves in the linoleum and curtain tracks on the ceiling show where the cots stood, back in the day when this was a dormitory. Back when so many girls wanted to be nuns, the residence house beside the school couldn't hold them. When Saint Cecilia didn't need to fill out its staff with lay people. Let alone non-Catholics. Let alone a Jew. Not that anyone here has ever made Becca feel unwelcome.

She pulls the chair to the desk and unpacks the blue bag. Sealable storage containers, breast pump, a dozen glossy three-by-fives: Leila rosy from her bath, snuggled in her stroller, peeking over Jules' shoulder. Becca's favorite is from the delivery room. It shows mother and newborn skin to skin, gazing into each other's eyes like lovers. Propping the picture against the bag, Becca reaches under her shirt, unclips her bra, and nestles her breast into the plastic pump. *Leila Leila Leila Leila*, she silently recites. But it's no good.

She gets to pump her breasts in the school's secret room. It's like a room from a dream.

It's those voices. Students. There must be three or four of them out there, their giggly whispers erupting into sudden screeches of laughter. And then the unmistakable scold of Sister Ignatius, and the party abruptly disperses.

Sister Ignatius wants to be Becca's friend. The other nuns might apologize to Becca for the ham on the buffet at the faculty retreat, or bore her with the details of their visits to the Holy Land. And Sister Marie Claire once introduced Becca to a visiting priest as *our wonderful Jewish librarian*, as if she were the answer to a trick question. But Sister Ignatius has actively courted Becca. Her first day on the job, the nun stopped by the library and announced that her favorite author is Chaim Potok. Since then, she has pursued Becca relentlessly, besieging her with questions. Did Becca have a fulfilling Day of Atonement? Has Becca noticed how the liturgy of the mass is rooted in Jewish ritual? Doesn't Becca love those canned macaroons they sell for Passover? Sister Ignatius sure does.

Becca has always fended her off with vague smiles and evasive answers. But today the nun upped the ante. She asked Becca to address her Religion 9 class. When Becca asked, *About what?* Sister Ignatius seemed genuinely surprised. *Being Jewish!* she said. *What did you think?*

What Becca had thought was: primary versus secondary sources. Research strategies. How to paraphrase without plagiarizing. Those are the topics she's qualified to teach. What does she know about being Jewish? She's a mediocre Jew, at best. But the nuns expect her to be as good at her religion as they are at theirs, so Becca avoids the ham even though it looks delicious, feigns regret that she still hasn't made it to Israel, stays home on Yom Kippur, even though she and Jules never do anything that even vaguely resembles atonement.

I'm hardly an expert, she told Sister Ignatius. *Now, now. Don't be modest*, Sister Ignatius replied, patting Becca's hand. Becca smiled back miserably. She and Jules always joke about how she's putting one over on the nuns. It's only fair, she supposes, that the joke should now be on her.

But she can't think about that now. She has a baby to feed, and the milk isn't coming. She sorts through the photos until she finds the opposite of the delivery-room picture: Leila at two months, alone and howling with rage. Jules took it soon after Becca went back to work. *Why should we only record the Hallmark moments?* he said when Becca objected.

Neither of them realized how valuable this shot would turn out to be, how reliably the knot of her daughter's desperate face would trigger letdown. *Where are you? I need you!* she imagines Leila screaming. *I'm hungry, I'm hungry, I'm hungry!* And sure enough, there's the heat. The tingling. And as Becca gently draws out the tube, here comes the milk, four pinprick streams spraying wildly against the sides of the cylinder and forming a pool of bluish-white liquid. *I need you, I need you*, Becca silently intones, no longer sure who's I and who's you. As her milk flows and flows, an oxytocin peace rises from within her, doubt and guilt washed away for as long as it takes the cylinder to fill.

Four hours later, Becca arrives home to find Jules waiting at the apartment door with Leila in his arms. The baby is wearing a new dress, bubblegum pink, with ruffles like whipped cream. Becca turns from Jules' kiss to pluck at the frothy hem.

"Where did this thing come from?"

"Nice to see you, too. Dee sent it. You don't like it?"

"It makes her look like a cupcake."

"Exactly! Who's my wittle cupcake?" Jules burrows his nose in the baby's belly, eliciting shrieks of delight.

Becca steps around them. She needs to get today's milk out of the blue bag and into the freezer. She needs to change her clothes and drink some water. And she needs to nurse. Now. But when she and the baby curl into their chair, Becca's too engorged for Leila to latch on.

"Maybe if you expressed first?" Jules suggests, as Leila wails with frustration.

ARTWORK BY LESLIE A. COLOMB

"I know how to nurse my baby!" Becca shouts, making Leila wail louder. "And stop hovering." She needs calm to nurse. And she needs to nurse to be calm. Ever since Leila was born, Becca has been like a junky, depending on the regular deliveries of chemical quiet that come with lactation. But when Leila finally settles, Becca still can't relax.

"You could have at least waited for me before opening the package."

"Your mom wanted to know if it fit."

"What else did you two talk about?"

"Secrets," Jules deadpans. But Becca doesn't laugh. "Come on," he says. "Would you rather your mom and I *didn't* get along?"

Becca doesn't answer. She and Jules used to make fun of her mother. It was their party shtick, a sure hit after the third drink. When Dee fussed over Becca's returning to work, Becca imitated her *But are you sure it's safe?* in her patented Mom Voice. When the issue shifted to Jules' fitness as a stay-at-home dad, he vamped in falsetto, to their friends' guffaws, *But how will you know what to do? Don't you have a … penis?* Becca and Jules were a team, and Dee the perfect foil. Then Becca returned to Saint Cecilia, and it became obvious to everyone that Jules isn't just a competent caregiver. He's a natural nurturer, way better at it than Becca will ever be. And what he can't figure out for himself, he asks his mother-in-law. Now he and Dee are on the phone every day, discussing sleep schedules and colic cures and who knows what else.

"Are you going to call and thank her for the dress?" he asks, still hovering.

"Didn't you already do that?"

"I'm sure she'd like to hear it from you."

"I hate the dress. And we have nothing to say to each other. She never wants to hear about work. All she ever asks is, *How are your nuns treating you?* as if the only thing that mattered about the place is that it's Catholic. You'd think I worked for the Spanish Inquisition."

"Why don't you just call her?"

"Why don't you stop being such a pain in the ass?" Becca says. But she picks up the phone.

"Thanks for the dress, Ma."

"Isn't it something?"

"It certainly is…pink." Across the room, Jules is patting the air with his palms, making a *be nice* gesture. But the sarcasm goes over Dee's head.

"I got such a chuckle out of it."

"Yup," Becca says. And then she runs out of things to say. It's one thing to not tell the truth. It's another to actually lie. Past the silence that hangs between them, Becca can hear her mother lighting her cigarette. Canned laughter drifts from her TV. Ever since Becca's dad died, she's kept it on all the time. *I know it's an idiot box*, she says. *But even an idiot can be company.*

"How are your nuns treating you?"

"You don't really want to know."

"Of course I do. Why would you say such a thing?"

"You always ask that exact same thing, in those exact same words, and as soon as I start telling you, you change the subject. You hate that I work there." Jules pats the air more emphatically. Becca waves him off.

"Don't be silly. You're the one who never wants to talk about it," her mother is saying. "I keep wondering what you're hiding."

"What would I be hiding? You want to know how the nuns treated me today? Sister Ignatius wants me to talk to her religion class. About being Jewish." As she says it, Becca can feel her heart pounding. That guilt again. But what has she done?

"Why would she do that?" Dee asks.

"I don't know, Ma. It's a roots thing, I guess. We're their roots."

"Hmm." Another pause. Then, "So, what will you tell them?"

"I don't know!" She's whining like a twelve year old. What's wrong with her? "What do you think I should say?"

"Me! I don't know," Dee admits, and they both go quiet again. Only this time the silence doesn't hang between them. It encloses them. Her mother discreetly coughs. Leila has fallen asleep. Her hair is damp and her head lolls back, her lips dreamily sucking as her body sinks and swells beneath the horrible dress. *Isn't it something?* Becca repeats to herself, practicing her mother's inflection. *I got such a chuckle out of it.* Where would she be without Dee for material?

"Okay, Ma," she says. "When you think about being Jewish, what's the first thing that comes to your mind?"

"Kosher," Dee answers, without hesitation. "Not that we ever were. We've never been good Jews."

"No. But we've always been Jews. We never considered being anything else."

"How could we? It's not like deciding what to wear in the morning. And I'm proud to be a Jew. Aren't you? We gave the world the Ten Commandments! Albert Einstein!"

"Sammy Davis Junior," Becca adds. "Ralph Lauren."

"Ralph Lauren! Since when is he Jewish?"

"Since forever, Ma. His real name is Ralph Lifshitz."

"I had no idea. Ralph Lifshitz!" Her laughter erupts as a bark, but quickly splinters into ragged coughs that cascade on and on. They hurt Becca's chest to hear. But when Dee recovers, she goes on as if nothing happened. "I'll tell you what's to be proud of," she says. "Arguments. Two Jews, three opinions."

"*That's* what you're proud of?"

"That's right. We think for ourselves."

"And that's what I should tell the class? Two Jews, three opinions?"

"You figure out what to tell them," her mother says. "Look it up, if you don't know. You work in a library, for God's sake."

> "You're the one who never wants to talk about it," her mother says. "I keep wondering what you're hiding."

The following Friday morning, Becca stands before Sister Ignatius's Religion 9 class. Her notes, neatly printed on numbered index cards, are lifted from a book she found in the Saint Cecilia library: *What the Jews Believe*. She had hoped her research would tap some deep memory, unlock the secret

door to her own ancestral room. But the words on the page could have been about anyone. Still, Becca has what she needs: the major holidays and the Sabbath, dietary laws and blessings, Torah and Talmud, the emphasis on discussion her mother alluded to. That's where Becca begins.

"There's an old saying," she tells the girls, in their matching yellow blouses and checked skirts. "Two Jews, three opinions." She pauses for the laugh, but no one does. At the back of the room in her grey dress and veil, Sister Ignatius looks puzzled. "It's a silly line," Becca forges on, "but it gets at something serious. Judaism encourages learning and discussion. We don't have a pope, and rabbis don't have special powers. They're teachers, not priests."

A girl in the third row raises her hand. "If you don't have priests, who hears your confession?"

Becca shuffles her cards. She was going to cover that under Yom Kippur. But she might as well do it now. "If you sin against God, you confess directly to God. If you sin against another person, you ask their forgiveness. But the main thing is changing your behavior."

Another hand. "What about Hell?"

"We don't really have Hell," Becca guesses, winging it.

"Then why be good?" someone calls out.

"Hands, ladies," Sister Ignatius warns.

"Because it's good to be good?" Becca improvises. "In Judaism, we believe that when everyone is good, the messiah will come. That will *be* the messiah, in a sense." She's not sure if this is true. But Sister Ignatius is nodding.

"Does the Jewish religion have sins, though?"

"Hands."

"Of course we have sins. We gave the world the Ten Commandments!"

"What about Jesus?"

"What *about* Jesus?"

"Why don't you believe in him?"

"Ladies! Why don't we let Ms. Rosen give her prepared talk?"

"Great," Becca says. But her cards are a mess. And her notes about dreidels and cheese burgers seem beside the point.

She's still fumbling for what to say next when someone close by murmurs, "Do you have Heaven, at least?" A kid in the front row smiles hopefully around a mouthful of braces.

"Not really. At least, I don't think so."

The girl stares at her, stricken. "Then what happens when you die?"

Becca has no idea. But she can't say that. Can she? "Excellent question," she stalls, and starts sorting through her cards, though she knows the answer isn't there. When her grandfather died she was nine, too big for her mother's lap. But she climbed on, anyway. *What happens when you die?* she asked. And her mother said, *I don't know*. Becca stayed mad at her for months, as if she'd invented death herself, just to make Becca miserable. What if one day she lets Leila down like that? She flips past *the miracle of the oil* and *no time for their bread to rise*. The silence weighs heavier and heavier on the room. Is it between them, or enclosing them? Why couldn't Dee have acted like a mom, and pretended to know, for just that moment? Maybe because she has never pretended. She has always just been who she is.

Becca sets the cards aside. The girls are all watching her. At the back of the room, Sister Ignatius is frowning.

"To be perfectly honest?" Becca says, so quietly they have to lean forward. "I don't know. Actually," she goes on, feeling a little sick, "I don't know most of this stuff." A flicker of exchanged glances. Sister Ignatius cocks her head. Becca swallows.

"I pretend to be a good Jew," she continues, already hearing her words whispered down the corridors, student to student and nun to nun, until they reach Sister Marie Claire, "because that's what everyone here seems to expect." *It has come to my attention*, her about-to-be-former boss will say. *I am very disappointed*. And then there's Jules. How can Becca tell him she's lost her job? And yet, there's something thrilling about how her heart keeps knocking and knocking. Something good about knowing why it's been pounding so hard.

"I shouldn't have pretended to be something I wasn't. I've been lying, and that's wrong. It's in the Ten Commandments, right? Bearing false witness?"

They're studying their desks, fidgeting with their notebooks, looking everywhere but at her. Only Sister Ignatius, when Becca's glance sweeps over her, catches her gaze and holds it. What is she thinking? Becca can't tell. She doesn't know the first thing about the woman. Not even how old she is. For all the times the nun has tried to talk to her, Becca has not once asked her a single question about herself. She never thought to look past the grey veil.

"That thing I was saying before? About confessions?" she says, speaking directly to Sister Ignatius. "I guess that's what I'm doing now. I let you down, and I'm sorry."

When the lunch bell rings, the girls file out solemnly, as if they were leaving mass. Becca concentrates on straightening her cards. Sister Ignatius waits until the room is empty before approaching.

"I'm really sorry," Becca says, yet again.

Sister Ignatius takes her hand. "I also need to ask your forgiveness."

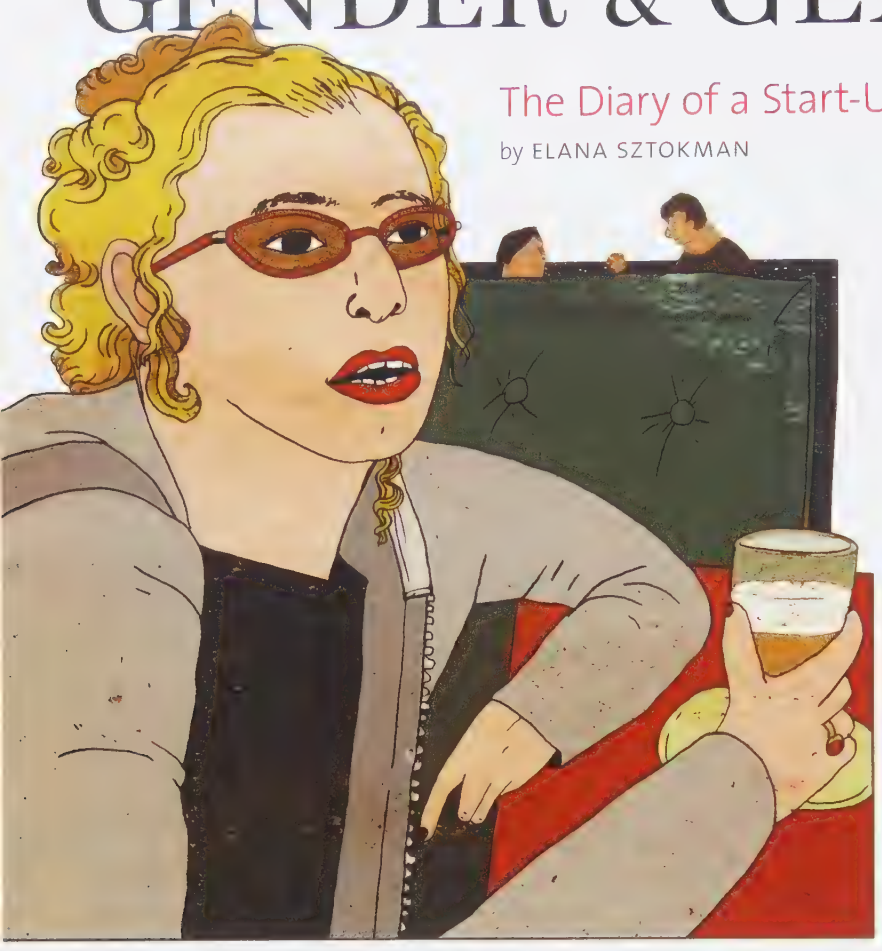
Later, when Becca dines out on the tale of her awkward atonement, creating a caricature of herself, she will make Sister Ignatius' apology the punch line. She won't tell her friends how weightless her unexpected confession leaves her. How she strolls out of the library with her blue bag swinging at her side. How she unlocks the door to the old dormitory without worrying about who's watching. How before she even unpacks her pictures, the perfect one forms in her mind: Leila sleeping peacefully in Dee's awful dress. How before she even positions the pump, she can feel her milk letting down. How in that moment she is struck—no, awed—by the miracle of tubes and ducts. The glory of needing and feeding. How she thinks, *There ought to be a blessing for this.* ■

Ruth Horowitz is a writer living in Rhode Island. She was a contributing editor at Seven Days newspaper in Burlington, Vermont, and has published five children's books. Her essay "Bound for Glory" appeared in Lilith in 2002. She is now at work on a novel about a haunting klezmer ballad.

GENDER & GENEROSITY

The Diary of a Start-Up Philanthropist

by ELANA SZTOKMAN



OCTOBER 2010

One Shabbat afternoon in my garden in Modi'in, a town halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, a few women friends and I began a conversation about our work lives which had an unexpected endpoint. As we shared some of our work frustrations, it turned out that we were all working in not-for-profit organizations—one in development in a leading Israeli museum, another in an educational institution, and another heading fundraising for a welfare organization. All in our thirties and forties, we are well-educated, feminist women, originally from English-speaking countries. We spoke about how the women's organizations run by women were struggling financially (especially after the economic downturn), and that we lacked a women's network to raise money specifically for women's causes—inequality under Jewish law of divorce, domestic violence, sexual assault and more. We agreed that women fundraisers—and *women's* causes—just don't have the access to money that our male counterparts have.

So in Modi'in that afternoon we decided to start a pooled charity—a women's fund—to create a community of women willing to support feminist innovations and causes, to provide women working on feminist issues with a women's networking for fundraising. We were going to be group-dependent philanthropists; we were going to find power through our collective resources.

JANUARY – MARCH 2011

In an posting in the daily email newsletter eJewish Philanthropy, I announced that a small group of women were getting together to create the Modi'in Women's Fund. "Each woman will donate a minimum 500 NIS ($140) per month for a year, and at the end of the year, with 20-30 participating donors, we will distribute the funds in several $5,000 grants to organizations run by women social entrepreneurs. It is time for women to start supporting the passions, dreams, and work of other women."

I also noted, maybe naively, that while this is a significant amount, "We all manage to pay for the things that are important to us—from clothes to gym memberships to manicures to coffee with friends. All of these things we pay for because they are priorities in our lives. Empowering women's visions, enabling female social entrepreneurs who are working tirelessly for a better Israel and a better world, must be a priority as well. It is time for us to prioritize women's power, women's passions and women's visions." Beyond doing good work—nudging along systemic change by funding feminist projects—we figured that making decisions about what to fund would empower the women funders into the bargain.

Israeli women's causes until now have tended to look primarily to diaspora Jewish women for serious funding, and while it is nice that American Jews often see Israel as a major area of interest, it feels skewed that Israeli women aren't doing the funding first. And how can it be that many major communities in American have community-based Jewish women's funds, but not a single town in Israel does?

ARTWORK BY RUTU MODAN

n ISRAEL

We wanted to encourage Israeli organizations to look first to *Israelis* for support, in particular now that Israel has created its own class of indigenously wealthy individuals—whether from the world of high tech or, despite rising prices and a class divide, from the world of business. Doing this with a particular focus on women seems an important concept for donors as well as for recipients: women donors are the ones most likely to understand women's needs, and I've seen from my work as a teacher that women achieve most effectively when they are mentored and nurtured by other women.

At our first meetings, a basic struggle emerged. How much should it cost to be a member of our women's fund? The minimum monthly contribution we started with—500 NIS (now about $135) per participant—is the same floor suggested to members of the UJA women's charity, Lions of Judah Israel. Starting the fund, the dozen or so women who came to those first meetings (out of a Modi'in population of 74,000) thought that this sounded reasonable. It was a sum that, collectively, could really make an impact. We thought that with these pooled funds we could give out two or three grants each year in amounts of, say, $5,000–$10,000 each, an amount that could fund, for example, a leadership course or a job-retraining program in a battered women's shelter.

There was tremendous resistance to this suggested donation. It became clear that women in Israel—even professional, educated, hard-working middle-class women—do not have $135 a month to spare. We eventually brought membership down to $36 a month, and met with resistance even there. That we had to lower so drastically the minimum sum for participation in the women's fund was our first indication that the problem of women and money in Israel was bigger than we'd realized.

The urgency of women's immediate needs came to a head quickly, when in January we found ourselves unexpectedly providing emergency assistance to a single mother of four, struggling with an emotionally unstable, financially unreliable and abusive ex-husband. She was working tirelessly to take care of her children with dignity, holding several different jobs at odd hours to make it all work. But when her oldest daughter suddenly had to be hospitalized for two weeks, her entire system for survival was about to fall apart.

So I wrote to neighbors and friends in our town asking for help. Immediately, women I didn't even know offered to make and deliver food, filling up a two-week Googledocs rotation chart within a day. And the donations of food were often generous of heart: home-baked challahs, grocery boxes filled to the brim, and elaborate freshly prepared meals. Women gave of themselves with enormous care and thoughtfulness. A few even added money donations to their food packages, which led the overwhelmed recipient of all this female goodwill to send tearful emails and text messages in reply.

While Israeli women often give generously with their baking, their time and their assistance in an emergency, that impulse doesn't necessarily translate into a widespread culture of women's philanthropy, one in which women see their donations as having the potential to change the circumstances that led to their neighbor's difficulties and disempowerment in the first place.

Women's philanthropy may be a growing field around the world, but in Israel it's still in its infancy. In addition to the widespread problem of getting women to take ownership of their money and use it for social change, there are additional cultural and logistical challenges in Israel that raise critical questions about how feminist work is—or should be—funded.

There are three general women's funds in Israel, although none is a geographically based, communal women's fund: the Dafna Fund (founded by the late Israeli feminist activist and Professor of Sociology Dafna Izraeli); Lions of Judah Israel, a branch of the UJA women's franchise; and the National Council of Jewish Women Israel Granting Program which, among other things, has supported a project to enable former sex workers to get vocational training. Missing is something important, it seemed to us, namely a community of Israeli women created explicitly to support women's needs. Women donors need to be a resource for women's causes.

> Israeli women give generously of their baking and their time—but not yet their money.

But not everyone sees the need as we do. While resistance to giving sums of money from their own accounts might have been predictable, we were even more surprised by resistance to the very *idea* of a women's fund from people we'd assumed would be supportive and even collaborative. I spoke at length to a woman who has a doctorate in gender and business development and holds an important position as an official advisor or women's issues. She had never heard of such a thing as a women's fund. And she is not alone. Although we explained that a women's fund benefits everyone, not just women and girls, our arguments fell into the abyss. When we asked her office to support an event last May to launch our initiative, she refused, telling us, in essence, that we were getting in the way.

One of the women with whom I shared my observations is Hamutal Gouri, director of the Dafna Fund, the first Israeli feminist foundation, founded by an Israeli philanthropist. "From my experience, the gender lens does not exist in Israeli philanthropy," she told me. "Certainly there are Israeli foundations that give to programs for women and girls, which is commendable. But the idea of philanthropy as a tool for social change, to advance women's leadership and to change the status of women—that is something we really need to develop here in Israel."

Ilana Shoshan is Israel's former Miss Universe-turned-feminist-movie producer, sponsor of the film "Miss-

Representation," about how mainstream media contribute to the under-representation of women in positions of power and influence in America. She goes around the world promoting feminist discourse pegged to the film and is "a lone example of a very successful woman who is a champion of the gender issue," Gouri commented. "But we need another 30 or 40 women like that, women who are willing to talk about gender inequality. Many successful women don't want to talk about it, or don't believe that it's a problem. So even though women are getting increasingly involved in philanthropy, we are not seeing a major difference in terms of gender mainstreaming, and funding with a gender lens." It's about addressing systemic problems that women face, and advancing women's economic, political and social status in society.

Barbara Dobkin, chair of the Dafna Fund's board, offers a useful reminder: that the Jewish women's funds in the U.S. grew slowly; their models were the donors' circles that had started in the general women's funding movement. "Understanding social change philanthropy is new in the U.S. too," she said.

APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2011

There has been some real excitement from individual women about the idea of women pooling their philanthropy. Women in Ra'anana and Jerusalem have decided to follow suit and are starting to build women's funds. Tellingly, like the Modi'in group, these early participants are all from English-speaking countries.

"There is some wonderful feminist work going on," Gouri said, including strong alliances between women's groups advocating for women in leadership, women's status in Judaism, violence against women, and more. "Feminists are making great strides and having an important influence. But the consciousness has not reached local philanthropy yet."

Part of the problem, I believe, is just how bad Israeli women's economic lives are. Although Israel is gaining international recognition for a supposedly strong economy and the creation of some thousand new millionaires each year from hi-tech exits, this economic prosperity is not necessarily reaching women.

There is no real middle class in Israel to begin with, and today the divide between rich and poor seems greater than ever. The social and economic protests in Tel Aviv in the summer of 2011—organized and led by a 25-year-old woman, Dafni Leef—made this divide very clear. Discretionary income is a rarity in a country where 60% of the population is living in perpetual overdraft. It's worse for women, who are still making only 63 *agorot* (cents) for every shekel earned by men [$1= NIS 3.85]. Plus, women still face significant obstacles to career and financial advancement. Women constitute only 17% of board members of publicly traded companies in Israel, and are only 4.5% of CEOs and 5% of board chairs, according to studies from the past year by Catalyst and Dunn & Bradstreet. Among potential donors and potential grantees, the message is identical and clear: many women have no money.

> It's a paradox. We want to do philanthropy for social change. But emergency needs are so desperate...

OCTOBER 2011

We continue to face the tension between meeting basic needs and making systemic change. Over the past year and a half, the reality of Israeli women's economic disempowerment has hit our group head on as we continue to readjust our working assumptions.

Every single one of our initial monthly meetings brought at least one new person who urged us to help individual women in need. Indeed, some came to plead for themselves. We received calls from social workers in other municipalities urging us to use our resources to help women struggling to stabilize their lives–mostly single mothers who could not support their families on one income and were battling to get help from their ex-husbands. They faced eviction, removal of their children to boarding schools, and frozen lives. We especially heard from single mothers who had left abusive marriages; they needed direct and immediate economic assistance. People weren't coming to our fund with requests that we support macro social change projects; but that we help women needing food that week. These proposals were not about social entrepreneurship or economic justice, but simply about survival in the moment. Sometimes we helped and sometimes we didn't. But we spent a lot of resources over the year—more than we ever intended or envisioned—paying for grocery bills.

There are actually many effective organizations in Israel dedicated to women's emotional, physical and financial advancement—teaching women how to believe in themselves, giving women tools for job retraining, mentoring, coaching, and more. The only thing that these groups do not necessarily do is *fund* the process of empowerment. And the reality of having no money is a circumstance that puts the brakes on moving forward, even with the strongest personal plans.

Helping individual women in need to change the immediate circumstances of their lives has evolved into one of the primary missions of our fund right now. This means that if a woman has a vision for a better life for herself and all she lacks is the funding to make it happen, that's where we can step in.

"Helping individual women and supporting economic empowerment for women are important goals," Hamutal Gouri said, "But it's not enough. We also have to be looking towards local philanthropy for *social change*."

And we acknowledge this; it's why we started the fund in the first place. But before every major holiday over the past year, our fund has been asked to provide food packages to struggling women in Modi'in. And we complied. Hardly the stuff of empowerment.

NOVEMBER 2011

There's also women's resistance to using the money they do have as power.

Some women who say they want to participate in our fund also say, "I don't have the money"—which, if you're staring at an overdraft, is literally true. But even with the overdraft, women find discretionary money to spend on other things. Many women get their hair done weekly and their nails done as often, regularly buy new shoes, go to Aroma, Israel's home-grown Starbucks

Many women still seek power through self-packaging (hair, nails) rather than using money as a source of power.

chain, at least once a week for coffee with friends—overdraft and all. (One of the rare times that the economics magazine Mamon had a woman on the cover was when it profiled Sharon Chen-Konofny, founder of the Israeli manicure chain "Laka." In the profile, she said she opened the business because every woman she knows reports without fail for a weekly hair-nails salon appointment.) So women are finding money for things that feel important to them. And often these things tend to revolve around gendered expectations of beauty. In Israel at least, women are still seeking out power more through self-packaging, rather than using money as a potential source of power.

Meanwhile, we've made another important discovery: Even though women are reluctant to part with 120 NIS per month, they are more than willing to donate their time and their food—both of which are donations in kind that women completely undervalue.

If someone spends two hours preparing, cooking and delivering a meal, isn't each hour worth at least 60 NIS? So if a woman is willing to part with two hours of time (plus supplies) to help a woman in need, why is she reluctant to commit to 120 NIS per month for a pooled fund? Many of the women we have been approaching to become philanthropists—even at our relatively small scale—do not yet view their time as money.

The good news is that in the past few years American philanthropist Barbara Dobkin and Nancy Sternoff, the former executive director of the Dobkin Family Foundation, put together a network of Jewish women's foundations that includes Israeli and American participants. Dobkin said it has taken 10 years for these women's funds "to begin to think expansively about social change giving and collaborative giving." The group has evolved into a network of 17 Jewish women's foundations—including the three Israeli ones—who plan to make their first collaborative grants in Israel this summer. This collaborative effort, one hopes, will raise the profile of gender-sensitive funding, and serve as a model for Israelis. As Lilith has pointed out in past articles on women's philanthropy, the very availability of funding that is earmarked for women's issues can spur organizations and individuals to notice problems and create innovative solutions to them. "Programs follow money" is how it is sometimes said. On the other hand, sometimes the good ideas are there all along, just waiting for funding so that they can be put into action.

JANUARY – APRIL 2012

Paradoxically, the reason we started the fund—to support gender-sensitive projects geared to changing underlying problems women face in Israel—was being undermined by more immediate needs. We found ourselves, out of compassion, addressing individual problems rather than the systemic problems keeping women down.

We keep changing our understanding of how the fund should operate. We've come to the conclusion that direct help to individual women has to be on the agenda in some form. We decided to pilot a two-pronged approach: giving one grant to an organization and one to a woman working to change her life. And unexpectedly, one woman, following her own sexual assault, pledged $5000 to our fund to support a rape crisis center. (Some of the women from the group had been very supportive of her during her ordeal, and this was her way of closing the circle).

We began receiving applications from women, including one particularly poignant one. A single mother who had been ultra-Orthodox and who had escaped from a mentally ill, violent man and rebuilt her life, had received mentoring, services and skills from various women's organizations and was surviving on crafts and housecleaning. She wanted to take a graphic design course in order to open her own business more professionally, so we decided to fund her studies. Unfortunately, her course was cancelled and then other problems struck, and she has not yet taken the course. Nor have we yet disbursed the grant money we allocated to her.

JUNE 2012

The challenges are manifold, among women as donors and women as recipients—that is, for women of all social strata. It's great to talk about social change, but when we are faced with women who are not sure how they are going to pay their food bills this month—including smart, educated working women who seem to be plagued by scarcities endemic to Israeli society—the conversation is much more difficult. We want to empower women for the long haul, but we also want to ease women's suffering right now. Long term goals, defined in the philanthropy world in terms such as "capacity" and "impact," often come into conflict with immediate goals such as direct assistance. Even some of our donors have found themselves in economic crises because they simply do not make enough money to live in a stable fashion.

In Modi'in we are trying to figure out how to resolve all this. In part it's about teaching women the difference between making lasagna and making long-term social change. ■

Dr. Elana Maryles Sztokman is a gender writer, educator and consultant. Her book, The Men's Section: Orthodox Jewish Men in an Egalitarian World, *was published by the Hadassah Brandeis Institute, UPNE, in 2011.*

WEB EXCLUSIVE: Read landmark Lilith articles on women's philanthropy at *http://lilith.org/landmark.htm.*

REVIEWS

Stumbling Upward

A convert's mid-faith crisis

In the Israeli society of which I am a part, there is an entire lexicon devoted to those whose religious practice is different from that of their parents and upbringing: from *baalei teshuva* (masters of repentance) who grew up secular and "returned" to Jewish tradition, to *hozrim b'she'eila* (returning with questions) and *datlashim* (*datiim l'she-avar*, formerly religious) who abandon their religious observance for a secular lifestyle. As these terms reflect, it is increasingly common to challenge or change one's religious identity, though few experience the seismic shifts documented in the spiritual autobiographies of **Lauren Winner**.

Winner, a historian of religion and an ordained Episcopal priest, is the author of several books on religious faith, most recently ***Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*** (Harper One, $24.99). Here she continues the journey she began in *Girl Meets God*, where she described how she was raised a Reform Jew by her Jewish father and Southern Baptist mother and converted first to Orthodox Judaism and then to evangelical Christianity. Her conversion to Judaism was the product of increasing engagement with Jewish learning and Jewish prayer throughout her adolescence and into her undergraduate years at Columbia, a college she chose "not because it had a pretty campus or a good lacrosse team or a favorable male-to-female ratio, but because it had hundreds of Orthodox Jews." Then, as a scholar of literature, she found herself increasingly drawn to the idea of the incarnation: "Embodiment was the novelistic culmination of anthropomorphism… If you are a good novelist, you give God hands and eyes." Winner became a devout Christian and a professor at an American divinity school. And then she got divorced.

A Reform Jew who converted first to Orthodoxy, then to Evangelical Christianity, tells why it's easier to read about prayer than to pray.

Still does not dwell on Winner's divorce, except insofar as this experience—coupled with the trauma of her mother's death—brought her to a spiritual crisis, the kind in which "the things you thought you knew about the spiritual life turn out not to suffice for the life you are actually living."

Winner paints a moving and honest picture of "wrestling with a God who isn't there, or maybe who is: what do you do in the midst of this absence? Where do you go?" Her reflections—on prayer, on loneliness and intimacy, on the middle parts of a journey—are movingly and passionately rendered, and she writes with surprising insight into both Judaism and Christianity. "Because it is easier to read about prayer than to pray, I have shelves full of books," she confesses, implicating her readers in her predicament. She considers the ways in which we often find ourselves too busy to engage with God, arguing that the modern condition of being too busy all the time is the equivalent to the deadly sin of sloth. And she confesses that she continues to long for the rhythms and routines of the Jewish calendar; the one holiday she continues to observe is also the only holiday that the traditional Jewish sages say will still be observed in the World-to-Come: the masquerade holiday of Purim, when she can show up at synagogue incognito.

Still pulses with the spiritual intensity of a Marilynne Robinson novel though it lacks the sophisticated engagement with specific Jewish and Christian texts and practices that distinguished *Girl Meets God* from other spiritual autobiographies. This is a shame, because few can write as knowledgeably and insightfully about both Judaism and Christianity as Lauren Winner, whose reading of the *midrashim* on the Book of Ruth is as informed as her analysis of the symbolism of Ash Wednesday. (And who else besides Winner would host a "Tikun Leyl Pentecost," adopting the Jewish practice of staying up all night to study religious texts?) Nonetheless, her new book, described by Winner's publisher as "lessons in stumbling upward," has an honesty and a humility borne of pain that has the power to speak to anyone—*ba'al teshuva*, *datlash*, or evangelical Christian—who has ever felt surprised by or bereft of God.

ILANA KURSHAN *is Lilith's books editor. She lives and writes in Jerusalem.*

Marrying to Rescue

Teens in Mandate Palestine

Several years ago, when my daughter was in middle school and Israel was very much in the news, I was struck by the dearth of young adult fiction that might help her understand its complexities. Thankfully the Israeli author **Nava Semel** has made solid contributions in this category with *Flying Lessons*, *Becoming Gershona*, and *And the Rat Laughed*. Her latest novel, ***Paper Bride*** (Hybrid Publishers, $25), joins the list of books imaginatively presenting Israel's early history and background to young readers.

The way Israelis think about themselves has changed; the period of innocence has passed.

Paper Bride is set in a Jewish village in British Mandate Palestine in 1935. It's told for the most part through the words of 12-year-old Uzik, an orphan who lives with his mother's sister, Aunt Miriam, and his older brother, Imri. Imri has been given a mission by the Jewish Agency to make a series of trips to Europe in order to marry four young Jewish women (one at a time) who wish to emigrate. Complications occur when he falls in love with his first wife, Anna, and the second wife refuses to grant him a divorce. As with most good young adult fiction, the suspenseful plot weaves back and forth and involves secret knowledge. Imri asks, "What do I know about women?" And because Uzik is such an attentive observer, he finds out a great deal about love, spiritual and physical.

The other secret is that part of Imri's mission is to buy guns for pre-State Israel. In opening and closing chapters that bracket the novel, a much older Uzik, now a grandfather, speaks in an elegiac tone, "weighing the balance of good and bad" in the shared history of his generation. As an adult reader, I appreciate Semel's acknowledgment that the period of innocence has passed; the way Israelis think about themselves and one another has changed. In a small moment at the very end of the novel, Uzik says, "Yes, I too have been contaminated." With this, the novel achieves an honesty and nuance sometimes lacking when other authors present this history.

Paper Bride includes a large cast—many of them stock characters: Major Charles Timothy Parker, the gracious, cynical, and gallant Englishman; Mohammed Daudi, the gentle, generous, and wise beekeeper; Aharonchik, the village butcher, a staunch Bolshevik and a romantic; Zionka, the schoolmate with beautiful handwriting and golden braids. Sometimes Uzik's words are perfectly calibrated in the voice of a 12-year old, and sometimes the sentences wobble between a younger or older child. At her best, Semel conveys a picture of Mandate Palestine that is affectionate and humorous. When Imri packs for Europe, he gathers up his father's old woolen suit, long stored in an old shed. When he practices knotting his tie, Uzik observes, "He looked like a condemned prisoner who had volunteered to tie his own noose." I especially liked "the Zionist duck," designated so because it liked to peck at a picture of Theodor Herzl, particularly the accompanying words, "If you will, it is no fairy-tale."

FRANCES BRENT, *author of* The Lost Cellos of Lev Aronson, *works as a freelance art journalist in New York.*

Leaving the Tribe

Women Who Used to Be Hasidic

The students in the course I am teaching on "Jewish Women Writers and the Search for Religion" have difficulty with the portrait of Orthodoxy often found in contemporary fiction. They ask: Is it really this bad? Aren't there any women with more positive perspectives on the Orthodox experience? (They wonder, too: are these the same questions their grandparents asked when Philip Roth first started writing about Jews?)

My students have a point. The past 15 years have witnessed an upsurge of fiction by Jewish women about the Orthodox world, much of it providing what purports to be unvarnished truth. The Satmar sect, in particular, is experiencing a literary moment in the sun this year with two new books by formerly Hasidic women—the memoir by twenty-four-year-old **Deborah Feldman**, ***Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots*** (Simon & Schuster, $23), and the English-language debut novel by **Anouk Markovitz**, ***I Am Forbidden*** (Hogarth, $25). Both shed new light on this old culture.

Although it takes a while to get to the "scandals" promised in Feldman's subtitle, the book has the honest feel of an author

who is trying to ferret out the hidden truths of a world so often cloaked in black. The details of her upbringing invite a confessional memoir: Feldman's mother, a poor, English child of divorce, marries Feldman's mentally disabled father as a way out of her own impoverishment. A lesbian, the mother eventually leaves her family and their Brooklyn Hasidic enclave—"driving off in her little Honda while everyone on the street poked their heads out the window to witness the spectacle. Perhaps she was the first woman in Williamsburg to drive." Shaped by her mother's experience, Feldman realizes that to stay is to remain under the authoritarian eye of the Satmar; to leave is to pursue opportunities forbidden to women of her sect.

Far subtler, *I Am Forbidden* is a powerful fictional evocation of 20th century Hasidic life. The female experience in Hasidic culture is largely relayed through the characters of Mila Heller and Atara Zalman, who grow up as sisters after the wartime murder of Mila's parents sends her to the Zalman home in Transylvania, in 1939. (The novel extends to present-day New York.) Mila's life conforms to her adopted parents' expectations, while Atara's reading of secular books leads her away from this cloistered world. Atara's hunger for learning makes her a true child of the Zalman family, but the strictures of ultra-Orthodoxy force an estrangement between father and daughter: "Zalman's Talmud folios and Atara's books were like neighbors who share a building without knowing each other, except that now and then Zalman searched the girls' rooms for secular writings and tore them up. 'I will not raise a Spinoza, not under my roof!'"

Exploring the Jewishness of their doubting characters was the concern of contemporary American Jewish writers influenced by Philip Roth; not for these two female authors. In the eyes of Feldman's ultra-Orthodox family, ultra-Orthodox is the only way to be Jewish, and life beyond its borders is considered "living like a goy." The "us" and "them" of earlier American Jewish literature was "Jew" and "gentile." But these books reveal that, for many Jewish writers today, the chasm between Orthodox and non-Orthodox is the critical divide.

Now and then Zalman searched the girls' rooms for secular writings and tore them up.

RACHEL GORDAN *teaches American Judaism at Northwestern University.*

So Long as We Can Say "This is the Worst"

Death, pain, and then a love letter

Shadows in Winter by **Eitan Fishbane** (Syracuse University Press, 2011) is a compelling, lyrical and honest look into what happens when the worst occurs. In 2007, Fishbane's wife, Leah—graduate student in Jewish history, mother to their four-year-old girl, Aderet, and two months pregnant—discovered a previously undiagnosed brain tumor and died two days later.

Fishbane, a professor in Jewish thought at the Jewish Theological Seminary, has crafted a beautiful memoir of his tragic experience, but also of his own life, his late wife's and his daughter's.

"We build our lives knowing that things will end," Fishbane writes, "that they may end suddenly and harshly.... But who really believes that it will happen? Careers, homes, marriages—we enter into their shelter, never quite accepting how fragile they really are. Like bridges that are constructed over rivers, or the towers that stand above cities, not until the moment of their sudden collapse is it ever imaginable."

Whereas Leon Wieseltier's *Kaddish* relies on scholarly and religious sources to build a scaffolding around his sorrow at the loss of his father, Fishbane opts instead to lay his heart bare in the hands of his reader.

Fishbane frees himself on the page to express the thoughts mourners usually have alone in the dark of night: "The truth is my mind keeps returning to the image of her six feet beneath the earth's surface." "At a deep level, I cannot really separate her identity from mine."

The pain Fishbane writes of is awful, unbearable—and yet, the book is also a love letter to love and a tribute to its power.

JORDANA HORN *is a lawyer, mother and writer working on her first novel.*

The Jewish Thing, Southern Style

Combating both racism and an eating disorder

In one of her incisive short poems, the English poet Stevie Smith assumes the voice of a dead man: "I was much further out than you thought," he moans, "I was much too far out all my life / And not waving but drowning." Luckily for the heroine of this quietly powerful novel, ***Saving Ruth*** (William Morrow, $14.99), by **Zoe Fishman**, her friends and family do realize that she is drowning, even while she insists that she is waving. Nineteen-year-old Ruth Wasserman, "Wass" to her friends, "Ruthie" to her parents and her brother, is home after her freshman year at the University of Michigan. Having spent her childhood self-conscious about her weight, she's proud of her new look—45 pounds thinner than when she graduated from high school. Trouble is, she remains obsessed with her body, unwilling to eat more than a few calories a day lest her stomach begin to bulge or the line of her jawbone be blurred by fat. Back home in her sleepy South Alabama town, she makes a mental list of what she will do for the summer: "lifeguard, coach, and not gain weight."

Part of the pleasure of this straightforward coming-of-age narrative is its modest scope: a handful of characters, a brief time period, one small location. Yet within this framework, a signifi-

Meet Clarice Lispector (1920-1977)
The Brazilian Jewish writer has her day at last!

Now, how shall I speak of a love that only has whatever one feels, and before which the word "love" is a dusty object? The hell I had gone through—how can I explain it to you?—had been the hell that comes from love. Ah, people put the idea of sin in sex. But how innocent and childish that sin is. The real hell is that of love. Love is the experience of a danger of greater sin—it is the experience of the mud and the degradation and the worst joy. Sex is the fright of a child. But how shall I speak for myself about the love that I now knew?

Translator Idra Novey tells us why we should know this woman.

Who was Clarice Lispector?

Like many visionary women writers of the twentieth century, Clarice Lispector's work wasn't given its proper due in her lifetime. Her probing, radical style and innovative approach to story are unlike anything found in the works of other twentieth century writers in any language. However, because Lispector was a woman and writing in Portuguese, it has taken years for her work to gain the recognition it deserves. Now, New Directions is releasing five new translations of her work: ***Near to the Wild Heart***, ***A Breath of Life***, ***Agua Viva***, ***The Passion According to G. H.***, and ***The Hour of the Star***. Barbara Epler, the editor-in-chief of New Directions and a visionary woman herself, hopes these new translations will finally establish Lispector's place in the canon of must-read twentieth century authors like Borges, Kafka, Garcia Marquez, Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and Gertrude Stein.

You're a poet. What drew you to translate Lispector's fiction?

I first read Lispector as an undergraduate and was so riveted by her voice that I decided to learn Portuguese so I could read her work in the original. I already spoke Spanish, so the leap to Portuguese wasn't very far. *The Passion According to G.H.* happens to be my favorite novel of hers, so I was particularly glad that it was the one New Directions asked me to translate. I often reread poetry, but one of the few prose writers I regularly return to is Lispector. Her sentences have the potency of poetry.

Translating *G.H.* (above) was a challenging pleasure. Even when I had to read a sentence 20 times before discovering the right words for it in English, being in the company of her thoughts each day was so transformative I didn't care that my head occasionally ached afterward. The risks she takes in the questions she poses, and how she poses them, challenged me not just as a translator but also as a writer. The protagonist in *G.H.* finds a crude drawing of herself on the wall of the maid's room who quit that morning and whose face G.H. struggles to recall. The drawing on the maid's wall leads G.H. to question the convenient self-delusions she has allowed herself to believe about her life and who she is to others. It's an intensely provocative, honest book. During the months I spent translating it, I finished writing a book of poems that I don't think I would have written if I weren't translating Lispector at the same time.

How did her lifetime of relocations influence her writing?

Lispector's family moved to Brazil from Ukraine when she was as an infant, and she always strongly identified with Brazil as her home country. But like many Jewish immigrant writers, she was seen as an outsider whose work was recognized as Brazilian but also foreign. She fiercely loved her country and its language regardless. In 1944, she married a diplomat and spent much of the next 15 years abroad, longing for Brazil and the Portuguese language so intensely that she ultimately left her husband in order to return to Rio with her two sons. She has a wonderful collection of stories about those years abroad, *The Foreign Legion*. Once she was back in Rio, she never lived abroad again.

What is her legacy for Jewish feminist literature?

G.H. is about a woman who poses questions to God while staring at a half-dead cockroach she's just smashed in the door of a wardrobe. At the beginning of the novel, Lispector includes a note for potential readers to warn them that she would be happy if the book was only read "by those who know the approach, of whatever it may be, is done gradually and painstakingly—passing through even the opposite of what it's going to approach." Perhaps Lispector's legacy for Jewish feminist literature is this notion of being willing to approach what readers may not like to hear and what authors may not want to say, but must say. Lispector had no interest in writing palatable books. Her art was finding a way to reveal the profoundly unsaid. And she says it in every book, which is why her work continues to matter.

IDRA NOVEY *is the author of the recently released* Exit, Civilian, *a 2011 National Poetry Series selection, and* The Next Country, *a finalist for the Foreword Book of the Year Award in poetry. She has taught in the Bard College Prison Initiative, at NYU, and in Columbia University School of the Arts.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF NEW DIRECTIONS

cant drama unfolds with wit, grace, and authentic feeling. Ruth—though she does not like herself—is a likable, smart, sassy young woman. The daughter of Jews who had moved to the South from New York (we never learn why), she has grown up as an outsider, realizing early on that her "Jewishness was something people could whisper about." Strikingly, she notes that while the comments about her weight as a child had hurt her, she could change that. "The Jewish thing, not so much."

Ruth slowly comes to terms with herself over the course of a summer that includes the near-drowning of a young black child at the pool where she is a lifeguard. She eventually accedes to her father's desire that she join him at synagogue; she begins, awkwardly at first but wholeheartedly in the end, to embrace herself and her family. When she gets the courage to stand up against casual white Southern racism, we realize that she is also in fact standing up for and defending herself—as a Jewish person, as a woman, as herself. Perhaps now she will begin eating again.

That Jewishness remains nothing more than a marker of difference, and that Jewishness and blackness are too easily collapsed suggests that there remain important territories to be explored outside the scope Fishman has chosen for her novel. Yet within the limits she has set for herself, *Saving Ruth* is a smart and satisfying read. Fishman richly captures the feel of summer evenings in the deep South, where the twilight feels "like honey" on one's shoulders and a boy's heart beats "like a hummingbird's wings." And she takes us fully into the struggle of one young woman to allow herself to be saved by the people who love her.

JOYCE ZONANA *teaches writing and literature at Borough of Manhattan Community College. She is the author of* Dream Homes: From Cairo to Katrin: An Exile's Journey.

A Novel of Manners

Edith Wharton updated

When Ellie Schneider, heroine of **Francesca Segal**'s ***The Innocents*** (Hyperion, $25.99), sits in a London synagogue on Yom Kippur eve, heads turn and tongues wag. She is newly returned to London from New York, a figure of scandal, having starred in an ostensibly pornographic movie and gotten kicked out of graduate school. She is also part of a prominent family whose demure, innocent daughter Rachel is newly engaged to another upstanding member of this traditional Jewish community.

Ellie Schneider might be singled out by these whispers of condemnation and fascination, but she doesn't stand alone as a literary figure. From its first pages, *The Innocents* deftly makes use of its literary forbear, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. Ellie is a modern-day Countess Ellen Olenska, whose return to turn-of-the-last-century New York following a scandalous marital separation meets with the same degree of curiosity and talk.

British Jews star in a novel about the pleasure and stultifying pain of "belonging."

Segal sticks closely enough to Wharton's novel to draw the reader into regular comparisons between the two books, but never too often. The greatest pleasure of relocating the themes and characters of one novel into another is the invitation to see the commonalities between disparate worlds, to consider the ways in which the norms and mores of upper-class New York a hundred years ago have much in common with this British Jewish community in which duty, family responsibility and reputation reign supreme.

In the case of *The Innocents*, Adam Newman is a dutiful young lawyer comfortably guided by his sense of obligation. Having lost his father at a young age, he is welcomed into the Gilbert family when he begins dating Rachel as a teenager. He wants what he is supposed to want and does what he is supposed to do, and yet bubbling under the surface is a growing urge for adventure and unpredictability. As he conforms to every convention, a voice inside him wonders if he and his fiancé might find a way to break those expectations, even in small ways.

The growing attraction between Ellie and Adam is inevitable; she is all that Rachel is not—impulsive, unrestrained and unconventional. Yet one of the most impressive aspects of *The Innocents* is that Rachel is never reduced to caricature. She might be obsessed with the details of her grand wedding and become unmoored as she wholeheartedly embraces housewifery, but the reader's sympathy lies with her as much as with Adam or Ellie. The Gilbert family, too, is portrayed with warmth and affection. It would be too easy to have them be terrible and overbearing, to have Rachel be mindless and demanding. Segal prevents any such easy escapes for her characters or her readers. She rounds out this world so that the choices between individuality and community, between passion and loyalty, are always painfully complicated.

To shatter the norms and leave a path of pain and dislocation; to stay comfortably inside and feel both the pleasure and stultifying pain of belonging. All too often this is an unsolvable dilemma—desire, responsibility, passion, and loyalty don't always fit together into a single neat life. Adam makes his decisions, but there are few clear-cut choices in life. Knowing that—as this book does—is the real end of innocence.

TOVA MIRVIS' *third novel,* Visible City, *will be published by Houghton Mifflin in 2013.*

Rebbetzin to Rebel

An artist opens up

Whatever is Contained Must Be Released: My Jewish Orthodox Girlhood, My Life as a Feminist Artist by **Helène Aylon** (The Feminist Press, 2012) is a witty, sensitive, self-deprecating memoir by an artist who went from being a rebbetzin to a rebel.

Helène Aylon, born 1931, is a visual artist known for her 1970s process paintings, 1980s anti-nuclear activist pieces, and 1990s/2000s feminist biblical explo-

ration The G-d Project. Comprising nine multimedia works that explore the role of women in Judaism, this last series has been exhibited at Jewish museums around the globe, from New York to Australia

This memoir starts with Aylon's birth in the ultra-orthodox community of Boro Park, relaying her experience of womanhood: "I was a Boro Park girl with a propensity for erotic Zionism." We learn how her *balabasteh* mother stopped her from kissing a boy in a succah, and how she went on to marry a domineering Montreal rabbi who died tragically in the 1960s, leaving her a young widow. The story addresses Aylon's subsequent journey as an artist, including her meetings with Mark Rothko and Mierle Ukeles, her controversial commission at JFK airport, and her work dedicated to Rabin, whose widow she subsequently met. The volume also includes illustrations of several works and their accompanying autobiographically informed poetry.

The first half of this book focuses on Aylon's childhood. Lyrical yet simple, it is filled with vivid descriptions and witticisms about religion and relationships: "'Mom,' I told her in 1971, 'I am in the Whitney Museum. It's a show called Lyrical Abstraction."/ 'The main thing, you should be nice with people.'" Aylon writes about her "post-Orthodox" experience of intense Jewish pride and shame, and her "J-dar" through which she can sniff out FFBs (frum from birth), BTs (baal tshuvas) and "wash-the-car-on-shabbos Jews." The author both loves and hates the suffocating world—and mother—that she emerged from: "To this day, any document, letter, or even email feels strangely lacking without the Bet and the Hei on the upper right corner. Baruch Hashem—blessed be G-d, here is my rent check. Here, Guggenheim folks, Baruch Hashem—here is my fifth grant request for you to ignore. Here, Reader, Baruch Hashem—here's my life." Never damning, she is contemplative and considered, shedding light on this largely hidden world and painting poignant, often heartbreaking, scenes of the complicated but concrete mother-daughter bond.

The second tranche, in which she discusses her art and feminism, is more earnest. Aylon suggests how Jewish artists and sensibilities were involved in both the abstract and feminist art movements. Her feminist critiques of Judaism (she reflects on the lack of the mother's name on the *ketubah*, for instance) seem obvious to a secular reviewer like myself who was born in the 70s, but serve to remind how much has changed for women's consciousness in such a short time. It is always tricky for a visual artist to write about her own work, but Aylon succeeds in weaving an interesting personal tale while offering a unique window into American art history.

The memoir does not read as an argument about religion and gender, nor as an in-depth assessment of the artist's developing identity and sexuality. It is, rather, an engaging and honest personal narrative by a remarkable character, an important historical document, and a rare hybrid of rabbis and art world notables.

JUDY BATALION *is a writer, performer and art historian. Her work has appeared in Salon, the Washington Post, the Jerusalem Post, Nerve, The Frisky and Babble.*

Dream a Way out of War

A Romanian village stops time

In ***No One Is Here Except All of Us*** by **Ramona Ausubel** (Riverhead Books,

$26.95), a small village of Romanian Jews simply refuses to acknowledge Hitler's threat. Nearly surrounded by a river, tiny Zalischik is so isolated that its barely 100 villagers think they can dream their way out of what they know, in 1939, to be their destiny. Led by the novel's young protagonist, Lena, and by a camp survivor who literally washes up on Zalischik's shores, they decide to start over in a world of their own making.

The rules are theirs, shaped only by the common interest. Lena has a brother and sister, and so she is given to her childless Aunt Kyla. In the dream world of Zalischik, time is malleable. Kyla imposes her wish for a baby on Lena by breastfeeding and "raising" her, never mind that she is 11 years old. When Kyla tires of Lena, she marries her off—despite Lena's now being, in real time, barely pubescent. Lena and her new husband, Igor, bear Solomon, the first child in the new Zalischik. Everyone is thrilled. Everyone dreams on.

Yet the villagers' clever reinvention is not a strong enough fortress; the town is invaded by a few Italian soldiers who kidnap Igor and take him back to Italy, their sole prisoner. Known as the champion sleeper of Zalischik, Igor gets to keep on dreaming. He spends every day with his jailor, Francisco, who is clearly in love with him. Every day they swim in the sea and sun themselves on the shore.

Meanwhile, German soldiers invade Zalischik. Lena, now mother of a second son, manages to escape. She and her children are guided only by a compass, surviving on rain-soaked bark. Eventually Lena's journey as a hunted animal is over, but at an incalculable personal expense. The "kindness" she is shown comes from the sort of wartime Christians who spared Jews only after making it clear that they regarded them as inferior beings.

When finally safe, Lena shares a train compartment with an old woman who says of God: He's very impressionable. . . . *We say, No one can eat meat from a pig and he says, Good idea. Someone else says, Everyone has to eat meat from a pig and he says, Fine with me. Someone says, Let's kill everyone with brown hair and he says, Sure, why don't you try it out. . . . God just likes a good story.*

Like much of Isaac Bashevis Singer's fiction, Ausubel's story unfolds in a reality so merciless it can only sustain itself by slipping into fable. Through her own lyricism and the alternative world constructed by her desperate characters, Ausubel has created the harshest kind of beauty.

Like Igor in Ausubul's novel, Ernst Volger in **Andromeda Romano-Lax**'s ***The Detour*** (Soho Press, $25.00) travels to Italy during Hitler's reign. Yet though Igor is imprisoned in Italy and Ernst is free, it is Ernst who fears for his life. He has come to pick up the original of the sculpture Hitler most admires, The Discus Thrower. Like his colleagues in the Third Reich's Sonderprojekt, the special project that acquires art for the Führer, Volger never utters Hitler's name, but calls him *Der Kunstsammler*, "The Collector."

Though coming to maturity under the influence of modern history's most unspeakable tyrant, young Ernst Volger thinks of himself as apolitical. He is a serious art lover who has been aimless until joining the *Sonderprojekt*. To him the assignment is simple; he must safeguard one of Classicism's most valuable art works during its transport. He is helped by a pair of enigmatic Italian twin brothers, who may or may not be working in Ernst's best interests.

The art of denial creates a new world; the art of sculpture looks like a way around Hitler.

At times the plot of this novel is overstocked with adventures—twists and turns that seem to place it in the road-trip genre. Yet there is psychological depth to this tale, and Romano-Lax skillfully plants hints about her circumspect protagonist, whose father so wanted him to live up to Hitler's physical ideal that he would harm Ernst himself sooner than have him fail to meet that ideal.

Eventually Ernst meets the twins' fiery sister Rosina, *The Detour*'s most vivid and compelling character, a woman who can seduce without being outwardly seductive. Rosina works her way into Ernst's imagination, staying there long after the war has ended. Now in a job helping to repatriate the artwork stolen by *Der Kunstsammler*—objects The Führer venerated while pursuing the extermination of an entire race—Ernst seeks out Rosina. Her surprise news changes this distant man into one redeemed by faith in love, in himself, and in a world finally grown fit to live in.

PATRICIA GROSSMAN *is the author, most recently, of the novel* Radiant Daughter.

Heroines Across the Spectrum

Collections of new short fiction

Short story lovers, rejoice! Two new collections flaunt both the skills of their respective writers and the enduring power of the form. In ***The Pretty Girl*** (Four Way Books, $17.95), **Debra Spark** proves a wonderfully inventive writer; her voice distinctive, her plots and characters unpredictable. She can shift, on a dime, from London in 1862, to an unnamed contemporary American suburb, throbbing with suppressed marital tension.

The most ambitious work here is the opening novella, *The Pretty Girl*. As a child, Andrea is enchanted by a painting in her Great-Aunt Rose's New York apartment; she dubs it The Pretty Girl. "She wasn't really a girl, but a laughing young woman with two raspberry gloves, which she held in one hand. She seemed to be looking at whomever was looking at her, and saying, 'Oh you silly. Go away.'" The painting holds talismanic power and Andrea decides to write about it for an art history assignment in college. But her aunt forbids her to do so for reasons that Andrea discovers only years later, after Rose's death. It's here that the novella makes a sudden shift: the point of view

switches and we are taken back in time, to Rose's own youth. It's a brilliant gambit, subverting our expectations about narrative structure while deepening our understanding of all that has come before.

Edith Pearlman is one of the unsung heroines of the short form, and her new collection, ***Binocular Vision*** (Lookout Books, $18.95), may finally make her into a household name. The stories here span the past 30 years. Although a few follow Sonya and Roland, employees in a DP camp after WWII, a number are set in and near Godolphin, "a leafy wedge" of Boston where Pearlman's characters live, love and die with a heartbreaking intensity that belies the seeming ordinariness of their days.

They live with heartbreaking intensity, despite the ordinariness of their days.

Pearlman's gifts are not flashy; she abjures shock value in favor of the exquisite—and at moments excruciating—infiltration of her characters' minds, hearts and souls. In the title story, the young protagonist borrows her father's binoculars to follow a married couple living next door. It is only when unexpected tragedy occurs that she is forced to recognize how her entire understanding of what she had seen is skewed. In *Self Reliance*, arguably the finest story in this gem-studded collection, Cornelia Fitch, the 70-ish heroine, takes a paddleboat ride on the pond near her New Hampshire cottage. Earlier that day, she has learned that her cancer has returned, but her oncologist is optimistic about his ability to "beat it back." The ride, equipped with sun hat, towel and a thermos filled with "its careful cocktail" is uneventful until, mind slightly foggy from the potion she's consumed, Cornelia realizes the boat is heading for the falls. She grabs onto a branch, leaving the boat to meet its fate, and then drops, unceremoniously, into the water to meet her own. The description of what Cornelia encounters there—a melding of past and present, fantasy and reality brings the final passage to a magnificent crescendo.

Cornelia...was in the company of a hard, semi-precious transparent sapphire substance, and as she watched, it flashed and then shattered, and shattered again, and again... Smaller and smaller, more numerous grew the components. Expanding in volume, they became a tumulus of stones, a mound of pebbles, a mountain of sand, a universe of dust, always retaining the blue color that itself was made up of royal and turquoise and white like first teeth. The stuff, finer still, churned, lifted her, tossed her, caressed her, entered her orifices, twirled and turned her, polished her with its grains. It rose into a spray that threw her aloft; it thickened into a spiral that caught her as she fell.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH *is Lilith's fiction editor. Her new novel,* A Wedding in Great Neck, *will be out in October 2012.*

The Best Colors by Barbara Taff is a fun story for children up to 100 to learn about diversity and teamwork through color mixing.

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www.thebestcolors.com

HAPPENING

Bagels, Blueberry Buns, Baby Beef

Are you a chef or nutritionist? Consider yourself kind of kosher? Would you not eat meat if you had to kill and prepare it yourself? Grow your own vegetables? Say a blessing before eating? Your grandparents were farmers? You might find others like yourself at Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs, the Jewish food movement's manifestation in the Greater Toronto Area, with an organic farm, CSA and an annual food conference. Hear from a backyard chicken advocate. Learn what makes cheese kosher and what makes Toronto's Jewish food culture unique. *shoresh.ca*

Coming Soon: A New Understanding of Love

Attitudes toward love and marriage have changed hugely in the past 50 years, thanks to social and sexual revolutions of the 1960s, the spread of feminism, liberalizing attitudes toward gender-role construction, new reproductive technologies, and economic shifts. Explore these deep changes at the International Conference on New Understandings of Gender, Love, and the Jewish Family, meeting December 26–27, 2012 at Jerusalem's Van Leer Institute, co-sponsoring this academic conference with Hadassah Brandeis Institute. Contact Dafna Schreiber, dafanas@vanleer.org.il.

Life, an Instructional Manual

Here's a new and monumental (900-page!) resource "pushing tradition gently forward... and sometimes addressing new perplexities," in the introductory words of Arnold M. Eisen. *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews* covers almost every topic you can think of, including Karen G. Reiss Medwed on prayer, Jane Kanarek on citizenship and contracts, Abigail Sosland on crime and punishment, Cheryl Peretz on employers and employees, Tracee Rosen on loans and lending, Nina Beth Cardin on neighborly relations, Elliot N. Dorff on same-sex relationships and Jeremy Kalmanofsky on sex, relationships and single Jews. *rabbinicalassembly.org*

It's a Wrap!

Who would have thought? Here's a women's tefillin *gemach*, a loan organization set up explicitly to provide tefillin for women who want to try out the mitzvah of wearing ritual phylacteries, or who have already taken on this observance but can't afford their own tefillin (which start at about $150). It was established by *soferet* (scribe) Jen Taylor Friedman, the first woman to write a Torah scroll. To borrow, contact Alexandra Casser, tell her a bit about yourself; she will mail you a set, and will answer questions on the use of your tefillin. After a few months, she'll get back in touch and ask if you would like to simply keep them longer, return them, or buy them either for the cost of a new pair (which the gemach will buy for the next borrower) or for whatever price you can afford. *womenstefillingemach@gmail.com*

Irma Stern

Two paintings, "Pink Sari" and "Zulu Girl" by Irma Stern (1894–1966) made news in the international art market in February, breaking records for South African art. They sold for $1.5 million and $727,000 respectively. The artist, born in South Africa to German-Jewish immigrant farmers, fled the Boer War with her mother in 1899 and spent her formative years in Germany, where she completed her arts education. She eventually had almost 100 solo exhibitions in South Africa and Europe. Stern's home in Capetown was made into a museum, and houses a permanent collection of her work. Several rooms are furnished as she arranged them; an upstairs gallery hosts contemporary South African artists. *irmastern.co.za*

From left: Celia Dropkin, Rokhl Kohn and Rashel Veprinski.

Candles of Song

Sheva Zucker, brought up in the tradition of secular Yidishkeyt , has launched a blog of Yiddish poems about mothers. You'll find transliteration, English translations, and a brief bio of each poet. There are even audio readings. Zucker names her blog—created in memory of her mother, Miriam Pearlman Zucker, 1914-2012—"Candle of Song," after a line in a poem by Rashel Veprinski: "Piously as my mother the waxen wicks, / I light my candle of song." Zucker notes that the pious lighting of Sabbath candles got transformed for Veprinski, and for her, into the equally spiritual act of writing Yiddish poetry. Other poets included so far: Malka Heifetz Tussman, Rajzel Zychlinsky, Gitl Schaechter-Viswanath, and Mani Leyb. Candles of Song is at: *http://shevazucker.com/blog*, and also on the Lilith blog: *www.Lilith.org/blog*.

Where Gays Are Welcome

Soon LGBTQ Jews and their loved ones will be able to find a welcoming institution or spiritual leader in the Jewish community. Help create this directory by filling out a short survey of yes/no questions. All information provided, except where clearly indicated, will be made public on the Keshet website. *keshetonline.org*

Jewish After-School Care

The Jewish Enrichment Center in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago is unusual because it serves young children from families across the Jewish spectrum, from day school attendees to unaffiliated. This afterschool program connects entire families via Sunday morning activities where infants through three-year olds attend along with their parents or grandparents. Nursery through second graders come after school during the week. Founder and director Rabbi Rebecca Milder says the center "brings together my three professional passions—Jewish education; informal, child-centered learning; and Jewish community-building." *Jewishenrichment.org*

Freedom Riders

Male and female volunteers ride the problematic Israeli public bus lines traveling through ultra-Orthdox neighborhoods which have required women to enter via the back door and sit in the rear. These "freedom riders" monitor implementation of the Israeli Supreme Court decision outlawing these discriminatory practices. They report any irregularity or violation of passengers' rights. Their efforts serve as a personal example for ultra-Orthodox women, showing them that they too, can sit at the front of the bus. To volunteer, contact Israel Religious Action Center field coordinator Eyal Ostrinsky, eyalos@irac.org or Netta Ravid, Freedom Riders coordinator, in Israel: 054-588-2407.

Women Heard in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

On Freedom Day, April 27, which this year marked 18 years since South Africa became a democracy, a group of women began a campaign to protest that in their Jewish community women's singing has been stricken from secular communal events. Eleven prominent female members of the Cape Town and Johannesburg communities explain why they oppose this exclusion. See them on the website of the South African Centre for Religious Equality and Diversity. SACRED describes itself as a progressive Jewish voice on relevant social, moral, ethical and religious issues. *sacred.org.za*

Women's Research Prize

A prize from International Council of Jewish Women, which represents Jewish women's organizations in 43 countries, will honor outstanding original research on topics that advances understanding of the role of Jewish women and their contribution as leaders; addresses a way to improve the situation of Jewish women and analyzes their effectiveness in the world; or evaluates the place of women within the predominantly male leadership structures in Jewish life. Winner receives a $1,000 honorarium. Submissions must be received by September 2, 2012. *www.icjw.org*

Makom—Creative Canadian Downtown Judaism

This grassroots inclusive downtown Toronto community has been building traditional and progressive Jewish life in that city since 2009, integrating Jewish learning, arts and culture, prayer and ritual, and social and environmental activism. Gathering every other Friday night, Makom also offers bi-weekly Saturday afternoon meditation, a monthly women's new-moon circle, holiday programming, and events for young families. Its agenda is to breathe new energy into downtown areas that were once the hub of Toronto Jewish life. *makomto.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, follow Lilith on Facebook and Twitter, check out Lilith.org, and sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter. Send suggestions for this section to info@Lilith.org.

WHY I GAVE A KIDNEY TO A STRANGER

by DEVORA STEINMETZ

LAST MONTH, I WAS WHEELED INTO AN OPERATING room in Beilinson Hospital in Petach Tikva, an anesthesiologist said *laila tov*, and a surgeon removed my left kidney, which was brought to an adjoining operating room and put into the abdomen of a 23-year-old Israeli dental student from Georgia, FSU, whom I met for the first time three months ago.

I told very few people beforehand, mostly family and people with whom I had to cancel appointments to pursue the extensive medical and psychological testing and ethics review that Israel has in place to ensure that donors are not offering kidneys for personal gain, are not at high risk for medical or psychological complications, and have given sufficient consideration to the choice to become a living kidney donor.

While most people tend to express admiration for living donors, there is often an assumption that such a person a person is either a little crazy or exceptionally righteous. Indeed, just last year a mature and thoughtful student in my Talmud class used the example of "people who donate their kidney to a stranger" to illustrate the kind of person who is *insufferably* righteous. The testing and interview process exacerbated this sense that I must be either crazy or a saint. If there's one thing that seemed potentially worse than going through life thinking you're pretty weird, it's going through life thinking that you must be better than everyone else.

So I've decided to write about my kidney donation both to call attention to the critical shortage of transplant organs and to explain my own choice to become a living donor.

THE IDEA FIRST CAME TO ME WHEN, TWICE IN SEVERAL months, two of my children's day schools sent out a notice about a parent who needed a kidney. I learned that there are simply not enough organs available from deceased donors to meet the needs of transplant patients; that kidney donation surgery has proven very safe; and that there don't seem to be any long-term health effects of living with only one kidney.

Donating a kidney seemed like a straightforward opportunity to save someone's life—an incredible privilege and an extraordinary *mitzvah*.

The issue of organ shortage is especially serious in Israel (for reasons that, it should be noted, go well beyond religious concerns). I decided to try to donate a kidney in Israel, where I am living this year. I began to see postings on a couple of e-mail lists about individuals who need a kidney, and that is how, ultimately, I found myself meeting the serious young student and his parents three months ago when we came to the hospital to do cross-match testing. He was a person in need of someone to step forward and save his life; I was a person who had the capacity to do that. The testing proved us to be a match, and in May I gave him one of my kidneys.

So what do I make of the fact that what seems so simple to me is something that most people would never think of doing?

Ten or so years ago, I heard the following Torah teaching at the Carlebach shul in New York: When someone does *chesed* [loving-kindness] for you, you want to find a way to reciprocate; in most cases you can't. Yet you can pay this back by doing chesed for someone else. I have been the recipient of extraordinary chesed. Just around the time that I heard this, my family was dealing with a serious illness, and many people helped us in ways that I could never have imagined. I knew that there was no way I could ever reciprocate. But what I could do was try to take opportunities to do chesed for others.

I'm not scared by hospitals, I am not afraid of blood, I am not very sensitive to pain, I'm a bit of a risk-taker. For me, donating a kidney was a rather easy thing to decide to carry out. There are endless ways in which other people do chesed that I may be less good at. Just as those people who helped our family might not be able to offer their kidneys, I might not be able to offer the kind of help they did, or even notice that that kind of help is needed. I am not saying I decided to donate a kidney in order to pay back the people who helped us. But I do believe that their acts of chesed enabled me to be more sensitive to the needs of others, and to imagine extending myself in the way I did.

AS I WAS PREPARING TO LEAVE BEILINSON, MY HUSBAND and I went to say goodbye to my kidney recipient and his parents. The student and his father are shy, the mother effusive. She wants to buy me things, to send me presents, to send my family on a vacation to the Dead Sea. I have told her over and over that I don't want anything, that I can't take anything, but she persists. So finally I told her the Torah teaching that I'd learned, and I blessed her son and her and her husband with many years of good health full of many opportunities to do chesed for others. And suddenly this woman, who had been trying to shower me with chocolate and perfume, told me that her son had a plan for when he finishes school and becomes a dentist—that he would set aside one day each month, in my name, to treat people who can't afford to pay. I don't know whether he will do exactly that, but I did feel that my own act, like the acts of those who have done chesed for me and for my family, will generate more acts of chesed in the world.

Each of us has the capacity to do tremendous acts of chesed. If donating a kidney is not your path, know that you have ways to help someone that may be just as powerful and lifesaving. May we all be privileged to find our own path in the Torah of chesed. ■

A version of this piece appeared in the New York Jewish Week.

Devora Steinmetz (desteinmetz@gmail.com) has taught Talmud and Rabbinics at Drisha, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Havruta and Yeshivat Hadar. She is an educational consultant for the Mandel Foundation and is spending this year as visiting scholar at the Mandel Leadership Institute in Jerusalem.